

MLSU - CENTRAL LIBRARY



6439EX

TEACHER-PARENT

INTERVIEWS

by

GRACE LANGDON

and

IRVING W. STOUT

PRENTICE-HALL, INC.
Englewood Cliffs, N. J.

PRENTICE-HALL EDUCATION SERIES

Harold Spears, *Editor*

COPYRIGHT, 1954, BY
PRENTICE-HALL, INC.
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, N. J.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the publisher.

L.C. Cat. Card No.: 54-9893

First printing *July, 1954*
Second printing *August, 1955*
Third printing *September, 1956*
Fourth printing *May, 1957*
Fifth printing *August, 1957*
Sixth printing *June, 1959*

RAJASTHAN UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION LIBRARY
UDAIPUR

Printed in the United States of America

88886

Preface

THE KIND OF INTERVIEWING DISCUSSED IN this book is the kind that any teacher who *wants* to can do, and can learn to do well. The book has been written with a deep conviction, growing out of many years of experience, that there is something very important to be gained by teacher and parents talking directly with each other. Some of the suggestions offered have been gleaned from teachers we have known over the years; teachers who had their moments of doubt and fear about interviewing, but who persisted in finding the way to do it. Many of the suggestions have come out of our own years of experience, in which the conviction has steadily deepened that nothing can take the place of talking with parents in helping a teacher to understand the children. The suggestions offered cover the range from nursery school through high school, because we believe so strongly that the school life of boys and girls of *any* age can be bettered by teacher and parents talking together.

Before the final writing of the book had been started, a detailed but tentative outline was sent out by our publishers to some hundred or more individuals in various parts of the United States for their comments and suggestions. The group included

classroom teachers from nursery school through high school, college instructors, superintendents of schools, principals, and supervisors. We are very grateful for the time and thought that these people gave to the outline and for their suggestions, which have greatly influenced both the organization and the content of the book.

Many of these readers suggested that the book be set up for quick and easy reference, so that, as one teacher said, "A person will not have to read the whole book every time help on some special point is wanted." To accomplish this we have used topical headings rather freely and have numbered suggestions whenever possible. We had not intended to say as much as we have about the content of interviews (Part Three). It has been done in response to many suggestions, such as: "Put in what to talk about." "I think I can get along if I only know what to start talking about." "Please give some specific suggestions on what to say." We have tried to be specific without being didactic. We have given very definite suggestions, but we have reiterated and reiterated that *there is no one way*; that, since each teacher and each parent is different, what is talked about in each interview will be different. We have emphasized repeatedly that teachers must make their own selection, must find both the things to talk about and the ways of interviewing that best fit their particular situations.

When the outline of the book was sent out, one of the questions asked concerned the administrator's relationship in teacher-parent interviews and where this topic should be treated in the book. Replies were about evenly divided, some reviewers suggesting a separate section, others preferring that the administrator be considered throughout the book. We did it the latter way because the administrator is, after all, a part of everything that goes on in the school. Although he will probably not be physically present at most of the interviews, he will be in on them—will always, in fact, have the final word on whether or not there will be any interviews.

The organization of the book reflects our own basic attitudes

concerning the interview. In Part One we discuss the reasons for having interviews. Here, as in the rest of the book, our sights are set on the youngster and his well-being. This is not in any way to minimize the importance of what interviews can do for the teacher, the parents, and the school. All of these are important. It only means that the youngster is the primary reason for there being an interview; that bettering his school living is the main purpose of the interview. And, as we see it, one great factor in favor of interviewing is that it is something any teacher can do.

Part Two considers the feelings that underlie any interview. If the interview does not begin with the consideration of feelings, it is a structure without a foundation, one which may topple over at any moment. Great emphasis has been given to this, because so often feelings are ignored until they get in the way and force one to consider them. We have discussed the feelings of the child, the parents, the teacher, and, of course, the administrator.

We have put "What to talk about" next because it seems natural to proceed from the feelings of the people concerned to the things they want to talk about. One chapter in this part describes actual interviews which teachers have had with parents of children of various ages. When the outlines were sent out, the readers were asked whether or not case studies should be used. Replies showed a strong preference for illustrative detail, rather than case studies as such. Many of the illustrations have come out of our own experience, either out of our own interviewing or out of interviewing with which we were directly concerned, in an administrative or supervisory way. But all are real interviews; not hypothetical.

All those things ordinarily considered as the mechanics of interviewing are discussed in Part Four, "Planning and doing." We have included in this section not only very specific suggestions about how, when, and where, but also some do's and don't's that will make the interview useful to both teacher and parents. The question of what to do about record-keeping is also raised, and some suggestions are offered. Then, of course, there

are a few words of conclusion, followed by a list of readings to supplement what is offered in this book.

We have tried to make the book useful both for teachers who are just beginning in interviewing and for those who have made a start but who want to make their interviews smoother and more beneficial to all concerned. If some have found themselves in a rut, there may be something that will give them new vision and the impetus to climb out of the rut and get going. We have tried to make this volume useful enough to serve as a sort of handbook, rather than something to be read once and left. Perhaps it may prove useful for staff discussions and for group study. We have hoped, too, that college instructors who are concerned with helping students prepare for teaching might want to use it; perhaps as a text, perhaps for reference.

As we have worked on this book, we have felt great gratitude for the deepened insight into teacher-parent interviews that has come through the hundreds of interviews forming the basis for our previous books, *These Well-Adjusted Children*, and *The Discipline of Well-Adjusted Children*. We appreciate all the help from the teachers and graduate students who worked on those interviews, and from the parents who gave so generously of their time and interest. We learned a great deal from these interviews and, more recently, from a large number held with parents among the Indian, Mexican, and Spanish families of our Southwest. One thing that has been clearly evident to us is that when teachers and parents talk together, teaching is improved. And interviewing can really be *made into an enjoyable, useful experience*.

We are deeply grateful to Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, for the interest expressed, through both financial assistance and encouragement and confidence, in this whole matter of teacher-parent interviews, and for the continued stimulation from that institution to get our thoughts about this subject onto paper.

GRACE LANGDON
IRVING W. STOUT

Contents

Part One

IN FAVOR OF TEACHER-PARENT INTERVIEWS

1. Why have interviews? 3

1. As far as the children are concerned, 4 · 2. From the parents' standpoint, 7 · 3. From the teacher's angle, 9 · 4. From the point of view of both teacher and parents, 11 · 5. As it concerns the administrator, 13

2. Any teacher can interview 16

1. It is natural to talk with parents, 16 · 2. For further encouragement, 17 · 3. An over-all look at interviewing helps, 19 · 4. Now is the best time to start, 21 · 5. Keep on and learn more, 22

Part Two

FEELINGS THAT UNDERLIE ALL TEACHER-PARENT INTERVIEWS

3. The child's feelings 27

1. How a child feels about himself, 28 · 2. How a child feels about his parents, 29 · 3. How a child feels about his home, 32 · 4. How a child feels about the neighborhood and community in which he lives, 33 · 5. How a child feels about other children, 34 · 6. How a child feels about his teacher, 35

4. The parents' feelings 39

1. How the parents feel about the child, 39 · 2. How the parents feel about their home, 42 · 3. How the parents feel

viii CONTENTS

about themselves, 44 • 4. *How the parents feel about the teacher, 45*

5. The teacher's feelings

49

1. *How the teacher feels about the children, 50* • 2. *How the teacher feels about the parents, 53* • 3. *How the teacher feels about the homes, 55* • 4. *How the teacher feels about herself, 57* • 5. *How the teacher feels about having interviews, 59*

6. The administrator's feelings

61

1. *Feelings about the children, 62* • 2. *About the parents, 64* • 3. *About the school, 67* • 4. *About teacher-parent interviews, 69*

Part Three

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

7. Situations often occasioning interviews

77

A. INITIATED BY THE TEACHER

78

1. *Child frequently absent, 78* • 2. *Schoolwork easy, how to offer child more challenge, 80* • 3. *Child has special talent, 81* • 4. *Child is new to the school, 82* • 5. *Child needs home help, 83* • 6. *Teacher wants to get acquainted, 84* • 7. *New reporting system, 86* • 8. *Teacher wants parent to help in school, 88* • 9. *Half-day sessions planned, 89* • 10. *Child is troublesome, 90*

B. INITIATED BY THE PARENTS

91

1. *Dissatisfied with reading method, 91* • 2. *Too much freedom, 93* • 3. *Child is "picked on," 94* • 4. *Poor grades, 96* • 5. *Too much homework, 97* • 6. *Family emergency, 99* • 7. *Help wanted on problem, 100* • 8. *Concerned about late hours, 102* • 9. *Trip necessitates child's absence, 103* • 10. *Undesirable bus behavior, 105* • 11. *Want child to skip grade, 106*

8. Things told or asked

108

A. TYPES OF THINGS A TEACHER MAY WANT TO TELL

1. *Reason for schedule, 109* • 2. *Rules and regulations, 111* • 3. *Lunch arrangements, 113* • 4. *How reading is taught, 114* • 5. *Child's use of materials, 115* • 6. *Progress in school subjects, 116* • 7. *Workbooks, 116* • 8. *Group discussions, 117* • 9. *Helpful things child does, 118* • 10. *Things given emphasis, 119* • 11. *Child's part in group living, 120*

B. SOME THINGS THE TEACHER MAY WANT TO ASK 121

1. *Child's comments about school*, 122 · 2. *Child's home play materials*, 123 · 3. *Child's pets*, 124 · 4. *Child's home responsibilities*, 124 · 5. *Child's playmates*, 125 · 6. *Home discipline*, 126 · 7. *Child-parent activities*, 127 · 8. *Child's home enjoyments*, 128 · 9. *Child's babyhood*, 129 · 10. *Things enjoyed about child*, 130

C. INCIDENTAL INFORMATION 131

1. *Ambitions for child*, 132 · 2. *Eating-sleeping habits*, 132 · 3. *What parents expect of child*, 134 · 4. *"Good" and "bad" behavior*, 134 · 5. *Religion*, 135 · 6. *What told about sex*, 135 · 7. *Finances*, 137 · 8. *Family living pattern*, 138 · 9. *Family members*, 138 · 10. *Family feeling*, 139

9. Types of suggestions a teacher can give 141

A. IF THE CHILD IS JUST STARTING TO SCHOOL 142

1. *New-found independence*, 143 · 2. *Conversation about school*, 143 · 3. *When paintings are taken home*, 144 · 4. *Free use of materials*, 145 · 5. *Boys play with dolls*, 145 · 6. *About teaching manners*, 146 · 7. *Child's tempo*, 146 · 8. *No comparisons*, 147 · 9. *Calling for the child*, 148 · 10. *No hurry about reading*, 149 · 11. *Letting child help*, 150 · 12. *Relationships with other children*, 150 · 13. *Rich experiences*, 151 · 14. *Speech*, 152 · 15. *Easily handled clothes*, 152

B. IF THE CHILD IS IN THE PRIMARY GRADES 153

1. *Values*, 153 · 2. *Opinion on teaching methods*, 153 · 3. *Giving children responsibility*, 154 · 4. *Home help with arithmetic*, 155 · 5. *Children's magazines*, 155 · 6. *Child's friends*, 156 · 7. *Child's arguments*, 156 · 8. *Child's ideas about himself*, 157 · 9. *Readiness for writing and spelling*, 157 · 10. *Letting child be his age*, 158 · 11. *Limits needed*, 159 · 12. *Finishing a job*, 159 · 13. *Influence of other children*, 159 · 14. *Interrelationship of activities*, 161

C. IF THE CHILD IS IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES 162

1. *Homework time*, 162 · 2. *Independence and dependence*, 163 · 3. *Standing with friends*, 164 · 4. *Parental demands*, 165 · 5. *Praise and appreciation*, 165 · 6. *School activities at home*, 166 · 7. *Free time needed*, 166 · 8. *Varied interests*, 167 · 9. *Home influence on reading*, 168 · 10. *Using school learnings*, 169 · 11. *Enriching experiences*, 169 · 12. *Parents at school affairs*, 170 · 13. *Parental attitude toward grades*, 171

viii CONTENTS

about themselves, 44 · 4. How the parents feel about the teacher, 45

5. The teacher's feelings

49

1. How the teacher feels about the children, 50 · 2. How the teacher feels about the parents, 53 · 3. How the teacher feels about the homes, 55 · 4. How the teacher feels about herself, 57 · 5. How the teacher feels about having interviews, 59

6. The administrator's feelings

61

1. Feelings about the children, 62 · 2. About the parents, 64 · 3. About the school, 67 · 4. About teacher-parent interviews, 69

Part Three

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

7. Situations often occasioning interviews

77

A. INITIATED BY THE TEACHER

78

1. Child frequently absent, 78 · 2. Schoolwork easy, how to offer child more challenge, 80 · 3. Child has special talent, 81 · 4. Child is new to the school, 82 · 5. Child needs home help, 83 · 6. Teacher wants to get acquainted, 84 · 7. New reporting system, 86 · 8. Teacher wants parent to help in school, 88 · 9. Half-day sessions planned, 89 · 10. Child is troublesome, 90

B. INITIATED BY THE PARENTS

91

1. Dissatisfied with reading method, 91 · 2. Too much freedom, 93 · 3. Child is "picked on," 94 · 4. Poor grades, 96 · 5. Too much homework, 97 · 6. Family emergency, 99 · 7. Help wanted on problem, 100 · 8. Concerned about late hours, 102 · 9. Trip necessitates child's absence, 103 · 10. Undesirable bus behavior, 105 · 11. Want child to skip grade, 106

8. Things told or asked

108

A. TYPES OF THINGS A TEACHER MAY WANT TO TELL

1. Reason for schedule, 109 · 2. Rules and regulations, 111 · 3. Lunch arrangements, 113 · 4. How reading is taught, 114 · 5. Child's use of materials, 115 · 6. Progress in school subjects, 116 · 7. Workbooks, 116 · 8. Group discussions, 117 · 9. Helpful things child does, 118 · 10. Things given emphasis, 119 · 11. Child's part in group living, 120

B. SOME THINGS THE TEACHER MAY WANT TO ASK 121

1. *Child's comments about school*, 122 • 2. *Child's home play materials*, 123 • 3. *Child's pets*, 124 • 4. *Child's home responsibilities*, 124 • 5. *Child's playmates*, 125 • 6. *Home discipline*, 126 • 7. *Child-parent activities*, 127 • 8. *Child's home enjoyments*, 128 • 9. *Child's babyhood*, 129 • 10. *Things enjoyed about child*, 130

C. INCIDENTAL INFORMATION 131

1. *Ambitions for child*, 132 • 2. *Eating-sleeping habits*, 132 • 3. *What parents expect of child*, 134 • 4. *"Good" and "bad" behavior*, 134 • 5. *Religion*, 135 • 6. *What told about sex*, 135 • 7. *Finances*, 137 • 8. *Family living pattern*, 138 • 9. *Family members*, 138 • 10. *Family feeling*, 139

9. Types of suggestions a teacher can give 141

A. IF THE CHILD IS JUST STARTING TO SCHOOL 142

1. *New-found independence*, 143 • 2. *Conversation about school*, 143 • 3. *When paintings are taken home*, 144 • 4. *Free use of materials*, 145 • 5. *Boys play with dolls*, 145 • 6. *About teaching manners*, 146 • 7. *Child's tempo*, 146 • 8. *No comparisons*, 147 • 9. *Calling for the child*, 148 • 10. *No hurry about reading*, 149 • 11. *Letting child help*, 150 • 12. *Relationships with other children*, 150 • 13. *Rich experiences*, 151 • 14. *Speech*, 152 • 15. *Easily handled clothes*, 152

B. IF THE CHILD IS IN THE PRIMARY GRADES 153

1. *Values*, 153 • 2. *Opinion on teaching methods*, 153 • 3. *Giving children responsibility*, 154 • 4. *Home help with arithmetic*, 155 • 5. *Children's magazines*, 155 • 6. *Child's friends*, 156 • 7. *Child's arguments*, 156 • 8. *Child's ideas about himself*, 157 • 9. *Readiness for writing and spelling*, 157 • 10. *Letting child be his age*, 158 • 11. *Limits needed*, 159 • 12. *Finishing a job*, 159 • 13. *Influence of other children*, 159 • 14. *Interrelationship of activities*, 161

C. IF THE CHILD IS IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES 162

1. *Homework time*, 162 • 2. *Independence and dependence*, 163 • 3. *Standing with friends*, 164 • 4. *Parental demands*, 165 • 5. *Praise and appreciation*, 165 • 6. *School activities at home*, 166 • 7. *Free time needed*, 166 • 8. *Varied interests*, 167 • 9. *Home influence on reading*, 168 • 10. *Using school learnings*, 169 • 11. *Enriching experiences*, 169 • 12. *Parents at school affairs*, 170 • 13. *Parental attitude toward grades*, 171

x CONTENTS

D. IF HE IS A TEEN-AGER IN HIGH SCHOOL	172
1. Home reference materials, 174 · 2. Attitude toward parental opinions, 174 · 3. Reducing criticism, 175 · 4. Question of career, 176 · 5. Late hours, 176 · 6. Group acceptance and school progress, 177 · 7. Parental approval without pressure, 178 · 8. Nurturing independence, 178 · 9. Dating, 179 · 10. Desire to be grown-up, 180	
10. Some suggestions about what to do if—	183
A. SOME TYPICAL "IFS" RELATING TO ATTITUDE	184
1. Angry parent, 184 · 2. Suggestions ignored, 185 · 3. Evasion of serious discussion, 187 · 4. Always hurried, 188 · 5. Blames other parent, 189 · 6. Excuses child's behavior, 190 · 7. Wants guaranteed answer, 192 · 8. Cherishes problem, 192 · 9. Teacher is irritated, 193 · 10. Teacher feels inexperienced, 196	
B. IF MATTERS ARE NOT WITHIN TEACHER'S PROVINCE	197
1. Marital problems, 198 · 2. Deeply-rooted difficulties, 200 · 3. Health matters, 204	
C. IF DISCUSSION WOULD BE UNPROFESSIONAL	205
1. Critical comments, 205 · 2. Gossipy information given, 209 · 3. Information asked that should not be given, 210	
11. Some interviews—what was discussed	214
A. WITH PARENTS OF CHILDREN EIGHT AND UNDER	215
1. Messy eating and mealtime fussing, 215 · 2. Mother working and father must care for children, 216 · 3. Invited to home to get acquainted, 217 · 4. Temper tantrums, 218 · 5. Allegedly retarded child, 220 · 6. Working mother and broken home, 221 · 7. Just wanted to get acquainted, 222 · 8. How to tell child of father's plan to remarry, 223 · 9. Child's progress in school, 225 · 10. Child speaking little English starting to school, 226 · 11. Why child is sleepy and inattentive, 228 · 12. "To hear all the kid is doing," 229	
B. WITH PARENTS OF CHILDREN NINE THROUGH TWELVE	230
13. Child's dislike for school, 230 · 14. Trouble with other children, child wants to stop school and work, 231 · 15. Child's relationship to other children, 233 · 16. Child objects to same teacher for school, Sunday School, and Scout den-mother, 234	

• 17. "Just to hear about her school," 235 • 18. Parents want to meet the teacher, 236 • 19. Child's lack of interest in school, 237 • 20. Home visit to see child's room and pets, 238 • 21. To arrange for changing session attended, 240 • 22. Slump in grades, 241

C. WITH PARENTS OF TEEN-AGERS 242

23. Advisability of post-polio student preparing for teaching, 242 • 24. Boy wants to go to work and marry instead of college, 243 • 25. Working mother wonders about benefit to girl if she stopped, 245 • 26. Dissatisfaction with grades of girl working to capacity, 247 • 27. Dinner invitation to see new formal, 248 • 28. Father sees need for more extracurricular activities in school, 249 • 29. Father feels boy should be held to higher standards of work, 250 • 30. How uncle left with care of two girls can help with schoolwork, 251

Part Four

PLANNING AND DOING

12. What? How? When? Where? 257

A. SOME DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTERVIEWS 257

1. Planned, 258 • 2. Incidental, 259 • 3. Telephone, 261

B. PERSONS TO PARTICIPATE 262

1. The parents, 262 • 2. The child, 263 • 3. Others in family, 264 • 4. The administrator, 264 • 5. The specialist, 265

C. THE PLACE FOR THE INTERVIEW 267

1. At school, 267 • 2. At home, 269 • 3. Chance meeting places, 271

D. TIME FOR THE INTERVIEW 272

E. HOW MANY AND WHO SHALL INITIATE THEM? 274

F. LENGTH OF THE INTERVIEW 276

G. MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE INTERVIEW 277

1. The appointment, 278 • 2. Getting ideas together, 280 • 3. Helping parents find the place, 283 • 4. Thinking of parents' comfort, 283

xii CONTENTS

H. CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW 285

1. *Getting started*, 285 · 2. *Between starting and stopping*, 288 ·
3. *Closing the interview*, 292

13. Some do's and don't's 294

1. *Being honest*, 295 · 2. *Respecting confidence*, 297 · 3. *Not appearing shocked*, 298 · 4. *Not jumping to conclusions*, 300 ·
5. *Taking parents seriously*, 302 · 6. *Not being dogmatic*, 303 ·
7. *Avoiding arguments*, 304 · 8. *Avoiding teacherish language*, 305 ·
9. *Being understanding*, 305 · 10. *Being appreciative*, 307 ·
11. *Letting parents speak*, 308 · 12. *Willingness to explain*, 310 ·
13. *Readiness to change*, 311 · 14. *Summary*, 312

14. The question of keeping records 319

A. WHAT USE IS TO BE MADE OF RECORDS? 320

B. WHAT SHALL BE RECORDED? 322

1. *Considering what happened and organizing ideas*, 322 ·
2. *Suggested items useful to record*, 323

C. HOW SHALL RECORDING BE DONE? 326

1. *Decide on system*, 326 · 2. *Consider form to be used*, 327 ·
3. *Writing the records*, 329 · 4. *When to do it*, 329

D. THEN GOING ON FROM THERE 330

In conclusion 333

Some suggested readings 337

Index 349

PART ONE

In favor of teacher-parent interviews

Most teachers, at one time or another, have mulled over the pros and cons of having teacher-parent interviews. "Are they," one teacher asks, "worth the time it takes to have them?" Another raises the question, "How can a teacher ever be sure they will turn out well?" Still another may wonder, "What do they really accomplish anyway?" And there probably are those who wonder whether they have enough to give to make the parents want to come. Perhaps one is wholly new to interviewing, maybe even new to teaching. Or one who has had many interviews, none of which were very satisfactory, may be wondering whether it is of any use to go on. Administrators, too, have their moments of wondering what to do about interviewing; whether to give consent to the teacher who wants to interview but who is inexperienced in doing it; whether to prod the one who is reluctant or unwilling to undertake it; whether to take the time to give the teachers the help they need to make it really work. Maybe the doubts arise because so often interviews, instead of being looked upon as the natural talking together of teachers and parents, are thought of as something formal and a little austere and forbidding and therefore very difficult. They need not be so at all. It is a very natural thing for the teacher who lives with the child at school and the parent who lives with him at home to get together to compare notes. That is what teacher-parent interviewing is. There is much to be said in favor of it and many good purposes to be served by it. Any teacher can conduct the kind of interviews discussed in this book, and can learn to do it well.

1. Why have interviews?

AN AWARENESS OF THE MANY PURPOSES TO be served by teacher-parent interviews is something that comes with time and experience. Often a teacher begins without giving much thought to it other than being sure that the parents of the nursery school or kindergarten child provide a paint apron and extra panties in case of accident and call for the youngster at a given time; or that the parents of the primary child understand about lunch money, needed school supplies, or the arrangements for a trip; or that the parents know about their appointment on some PTA committee, or the plans for a party, or the child's part in some school affair. Or the parents may drop in to ask if the child may leave early the next day, and conversation goes on to other things. Or the teacher may feel that getting acquainted is a good way to start off the school year and so may make it a point to chat a few minutes at the school's opening night. The talking together often starts with a registration interview. The teacher may have realized that the interview was important but may not have thought that it would yield as much as it did beyond the facts asked for on the form provided. Or some difficulty may have come up that made it necessary to talk to the

4 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

parent and one thing led to another with the way opened for understanding the youngster as never before. In any case the good purposes to be served are likely to become more and more evident as talking together continues, whether the parents be those of children in the nursery school, elementary school, junior high, or even senior high.

Interviewing is thought of here as the natural, free, easy talking together of teacher and parent. Often the term "talking together" will be used to indicate the informality and naturalness that is intended, but this should never be mistaken for haphazard or superficial chit-chat. This talking together has a serious purpose, though one would hope that the seriousness would never preclude chuckles of enjoyment over the youngster's performances and satisfaction in his achievements. It is interviewing that begins with the schoolroom doings; with the work in the various school activities; with the schoolroom relationships. It has to do with the work, the fun, the accomplishments, the learnings, and the difficulties that take place as teacher and children live and learn together, day after day, week after week, through all the months of the school year. It is not the kind of interviewing that is commonly accepted as the function of the guidance counsellor or the clinical psychologist. It is another kind of interviewing to serve other purposes. It is interviewing which only the teacher can do. If the teacher does not do it it is not done, because no one can speak of all the little things that happen with their overtones and undertones of feeling unless one has had a part in the happening. Experience shows that it has something to offer to all concerned: children, parents, teacher, and administrator.

1. As far as the children are concerned.

For one thing, having his teacher and parents talk together serves to bring the two parts of a child's living closer together than when teacher and parents do not know how they agree and differ in their ways of looking at the youngster, his background.

and his school activities. The more teacher and parents understand each other the less a child is pulled this way and that between people who do not know what a difference there is between the two lives they are asking him to live. This does not mean that teachers and parents will always see eye to eye. They couldn't. A parent is quite likely to think that the teacher is a little too fussy in putting so much emphasis on one thing and not fussy enough about something else. The teacher may wonder why the parent thinks this or that; may not at all approve of the punishment used; may wish the child would get to bed earlier; may think that more could be done about something or other.

There is no reason why teacher and parents should agree on everything about the child. When a teacher can accept that fact and feel comfortable about it the urgent need to make the parents over into something they are not will diminish. It probably would not be a great improvement anyway, and the next teacher might want them made on a different pattern. Talking together does mean, though, that teacher and parent can come to know each other and to know how the home part and the school part of the child's life fit together.

When a teacher understands the home situation, gets the feeling of the parents' attitudes about the youngster and people and life in general, and sees them as people interested in this or that, with one thing vitally important and another not, it naturally stays in thought in all of the relationships with that child. This is of the greatest importance in a child's living. All of his home living, the home attitudes and relationships, and the home expectations are part of him. He brings them to school with him every day. The school experiences similarly become part of his living—the school attitudes and relationships, the teacher's expectations, the things that are approved and disapproved. All these he takes home with him each day. The more the school life is geared to take account of the home life, the smoother the sailing for the youngster. This does not mean making school ways of doing identical with those at home. This could not be done even if one

6 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

wished to do it. School must have its own ways. It does mean that knowing what goes on and considering it in all the work with Johnny and Sue and Joe and Sally makes life easier for them.

It usually is a great satisfaction to children, both little and big, to have their teacher and parents know each other. The children seem to get a sense of well-being from hearing the teacher speak of the parents as people who are known, whose personalities and attitudes are familiar to the teacher. It puts things on a more familiar, homey, comfortable basis than when "the teacher" is a vague sort of being unseen and unknown by the parents and the parents are only a name to the teacher. Even though along in the grades there comes the fear that the parents will be thought queer if they show up at school, the desire is still there. Witness the excited pointing out of "my teacher over there" at a ball game or concert or church affair or what not, and the proud air with which the boy or girl takes parents straight to the teacher at PTA open-house night. This being a special affair parents can come without being "queer." Indeed, on these occasions the queerness would be in staying away.

As far as a child's school work is concerned it seems all to the good for teacher and parents to get together. Teachers can tell of what is needed in a way the child could not, and so can make it possible for the parents to be of more help to him in homework, or in providing useful reference materials, or in broadening experiences so that he has plenty to talk about at school. Often a teacher can interpret a child's feeling about things happening at school when the child himself cannot define it sufficiently for words or when it would not occur to him to speak of it.

2. From the parents' standpoint.

The teacher is in the best position to bring to the parents the story of the child's progress in his school life, the story of his achievements, his interests, his difficulties, his perplexities, and his enjoyments, as revealed in his class work, in his association with others, and in his relationships with the teacher. Most parents

appreciate a sympathetic and understanding recountal and interpretation of all these things. The child probably would give fragments of it and from his own point of view, but to get it from an adult point of view and in light of what the youngster does in the schoolroom gives the parent a basis for guiding the youngster that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

The teacher is likely to pass on many enjoyable details that it would never occur to the child to tell, details which he would not know would be of interest to anyone. For example, how the three-year-old set a chair in the wagon and climbed atop with fireman's hat rakishly askew, screeching and sirening his way to the suppositional fire in the playhouse corner. Or how the first grader took the timid newcomer under her capable wing and steered her safely and happily through the intricacies of the day. Or how when the social studies class went on a fact-finding trip the fourth or fifth grader took the lead in asking the mayor about details of the local government. Or how the high school junior came up with a proposal in Student Council for an all-school project of exchanging pictures of interesting places and events with students in other countries to promote international understanding and good will—a plan perhaps vague in detail but big with possibilities and significant in intent.

The teacher is in a position to speak of learning, of growth, of development, which the child himself cannot see. This is of importance in these days when school living and learning is coming to be seen as extending far beyond book learning, when many of the things that a teacher considers important are less tangible than the number of pages read, or lines written, or problems solved. In talking with parents a teacher is likely to mention learning to plan together and to work together to carry out the plan; learning to see what needs to be done and to take responsibility for doing it; learning to look over a job to see what it entails to plan how to do it; learning to look at completed work with an eye to its evaluation and possible improvement. Other things may be spoken of, such as growing ability to find genuine and absorbing enjoyments; to talk out the difficulties that arise

8 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

with others rather than evading them; to find satisfaction in working with others and in working alone. These are things that most parents are glad to know the teacher has in mind as outcomes to be looked for in schoolroom living.

The interview can serve to give the parents information about the way teaching is done in their youngster's room. They are usually glad to have the teacher's explanation of whys and wherefores. There may be interest in hearing how a trip furnished the opportunity for discussion of what to look for and how to behave, and how, on the return, it was put into a story for reading, which meant writing and spelling too. There may be interest in hearing how the independent work periods are the opportunity for the children to find themselves a job and hold themselves to it, or to go about doing the job they and the teacher have agreed upon. If they have wondered why so much talking is allowed in the schoolroom they will welcome the teacher's explanation of this method, which allows children to help each other in a natural, easy way, so long as they don't disturb the other children. It is readily understandable that the child cannot interpret the significance of such things as these. Anyone can understand parents wanting to feel well informed. "We go to PTA open house," said one, "but beyond that what goes on is something we don't know except as we pick it up from the kid." Said another, "I'd like to know why they teach things the way they do down there. I don't like what I see about the way things are taught at that school but I don't know enough about it to make a fuss." It seems right that parents should know what goes on at school. That is one good purpose interviews can serve for them.

The interview can give them information, too, about facilities that the youngster takes for granted or mentions so casually as to give little idea of what they really are; such as the science laboratory, with its equipment for learning about atomic energy or about soil conservation or pest control or many other things; the home-making rooms, with the facilities for study of furniture arrangement, dress design and fitting, table setting and food service, child care, and the like; the shop with its varied machines;

the library, where children from all the grades can browse and learn to use reference material and to appreciate and properly care for books; the cafeteria, with its up-to-date equipment for food storage, cooking, and serving; or whatever facilities the school has.

It is usually reassuring to the parents to know that individual differences among the children are taken very much into account, that the teacher genuinely wants to fit the school program to the youngster, that anything the parents can tell about the child which will help in doing this will be very welcome. It is reassuring further to know that school subjects are not neglected; that the teacher feels that they are very important, though they are taught in a more comfortable and a more effective way than they used to be. A teacher does well to be ready to give clear, specific examples of how this is done. Perhaps she will tell how words that were hard to spell when writing a story were put on the board for drill, or how some interesting rock formations found on a trip led to a search for information about them and to the use of the information in writing a report.

From the parents' point of view the interview gives a chance to talk about the child with someone who cares about him but in a different way than the parent—a more detached way, yet still warm and close. The teacher, because of her preparation for teaching and experience with children, knows of things that are helpful to parents—about the way children grow and develop, about the things it is reasonable to expect of them as they grow, about how they look at things, and something of why they feel as they do from early childhood on. It is very natural that parents should find it helpful to talk with their child's teacher about things such as these.

3. From the teacher's angle.

One wonders whether a teacher can possibly understand a child without knowing and talking with his parents.

What they have to tell from time to time about the doings at

10 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

home, their feelings about it all, their interpretation of the youngster's feelings, and their explanations of why he does what he does give the teacher a bit of the picture here, another bit there. Then whatever the youngster does at school is seen in the light of the home setting, colored by the feeling tones revealed in the telling about it. Susie's bubbling enjoyment of everything that happens, her ready willingness to tackle anything that comes along, her confidence in herself and everyone else become part of a family picture of good times together, of plenty of chances to talk over any bit of trouble with Mother or Dad, of a family philosophy that helps them all to take everything in stride and to look upon difficulties as a challenge. It helps to know that that bubbling enjoyment and confidence is no surface thing but a part of the very fabric of the child's living, and that, whatever comes up at school, here are parents who have the pattern set for meeting the situation.

Dick's glum silences are easier to understand after the mother, in repeating a cute remark he made, casually referred to a breakfast-table quarrel. Things at school of course, cannot look very appealing until the feeling left by angry words fades away. All sorts of things that are said add to the understanding of the teacher who listens carefully. Ted must go to bed at the appointed hour no matter what comes or goes. Mike goes when he pleases but if his radio is on too long Dad yells at him to shut it off. Ted has to be home within a given time after school dismissal and may not go out to play until assigned chores are done. Jerry usually comes home in time to eat but not always, and any chores he has to do seem to cause little worry either to him or his parents. Tom has an allowance and must give an accounting for every cent of it. Jim has no allowance but earns some money and can spend it as he pleases. Ray's allowance is his to do with as he will after he has taken care of school supplies. Ben adores comic books and they are all over the place. The parents are not concerned. They say he will get over it. Lloyd's parents will not allow a comic book in the house. Ruth became interested in them a while back, so her parents got all they could find, sat down with

her, and went over them all and talked about which ones were objectionable and why. They leave it to her now to do her own censoring. So it goes, on and on.

How else than through talking with parents could a teacher know these intimate bits of family living? How else could one look at this group of perhaps twenty or thirty youngsters and have any idea of what they may be thinking about? The parents are the only ones who can tell about the child's growing from babyhood on, about his bringing up, about what they expect of him, what they hope for him, what they have taught him is right and wrong, about his whole pattern of living, about his relationships within the family and neighborhood, about the things he likes and doesn't like, about his pets, his friends, his fears, his enjoyments. The fund of knowledge that they can give about their child and the revealing of their feelings about him and what he does can be of invaluable help to a teacher in understanding why he does this or doesn't do that at school, in knowing how to tie up his reading, writing, and arithmetic and all the school doings with his out of school experiences. Talking together gives the further opportunity for both to explain things that might otherwise go unexplained and perhaps never fully understood; things that without the talking together one might never know needed explaining; things that a word of explanation can keep from becoming a mountain of misunderstanding.

4. From the point of view of both teacher and parents.

Both have the same concern: the youngster and his well-being. So it is natural enough that talking together should serve the many purposes that teacher and parents have in common.

The net result is useful information for both teacher and parents: information about the home doings for the one, about school doings for the other; information about how the teacher feels about this and that; information about how the parents feel. This is all helpful, since information is a much more sound basis for action than is speculation. There is good, sound practical

12 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

help to be had too, when teacher and parents get their heads together.

A teacher should remember that giving help need not be a one-sided thing. The sooner she can feel comfortable about letting parents give it too, the more useful the interviews can be. There are many useful tips they can give that come out of the twenty-four hour living with a youngster; out of all the thinking about the kind of youngster they want him to be and about the best ways to get him that way in the light of the kind of youngster he is. The parent's quick, "Oh, Johnny never did respond to that; you have to do it this way with him," may be just the cue that is needed for solving some school difficulty.

On the other hand, maybe the teacher has at her fingertips (or in a convenient notebook) the source for the toy or book or record the parent wants. Or there may be suggestions on how to get the three-year-old to look upon food with more happy acceptance, or on how to reduce the four- or five-year-old's tall tales to something like true proportions, or on what one might do about the six-year-old's dilly-dallying, or the seven- or eight-year-old's yen for running his own life, or the teen-ager's sudden flair for dates and late parties.

One of the purposes served by teacher and parents talking is their coming to think of each other as people. It is natural that a teacher should think of the parents collectively and somewhat vaguely as "the parents" until getting them sorted out according to the child to whom they belong. Even then Timmy's parents or Sue's or Joe's are likely to remain just that until there has been a chance to sit down and talk with them. Then an interest shows up in sports, or baseball, or photography, or it comes out that travel is the thing enjoyed and looked forward to above all else, or that the new house being built is an all-absorbing interest, or that interest in civic affairs is very intense, or that the garden is their pride and joy, or that family picnics are a source of great pleasure, or that the home-coming hour is looked forward to for a romp with the children. It is when things such as these are

spoken of that Timmy's mother or dad becomes a person, an individual; not merely "a parent."

Often it is hard for parents to see the teacher as a person. The memory of some childhood teacher who was feared may stand in the way. Perhaps there is a carry-over from early days of a general feeling that teachers are not quite human. Teachers sometimes stay a little aloof, always "the teacher," instead of letting parents see their interests, their likes and dislikes, their hopes and ambitions, their enjoyments, their warmth of feeling. Anyway, talking together does offer the opportunity to see each other as people.

Sometimes a teacher holds back from enjoying the parents as people lest in the group there be some better liked than others, which might give the impression of seeming to have favorites. Whether or not a teacher will make warm close friendships with some of the parents is, of course, a matter for individual decision. Many do. In any event talking together in a free, easy way leads naturally to looking upon them as individuals and to enjoying the acquaintance with them. As acquaintance progresses it is natural that, since both have the interest of the child at heart, confidence and mutual respect should grow. In those rare instances where there cannot be respect and where little cause for confidence can be found, there still seems good reason for a teacher to reach out with friendliness for some point of contact. It often is found where least expected.

5. As it concerns the administrator.

As a teacher goes on talking with parents there is almost sure to come a deepened insight into the purpose to be served from the administrator's point of view. He, of course, looks at it from an over-all point of view, since he has the whole school in mind and must see each thing in relation to everything else.

One of his concerns is almost certain to be with the way parents feel about the school. Naturally he wants them to have

14 WHY HAVE INTERVIEWS?

confidence in it, to be satisfied with what their children are getting there, to be ready to stand back of what goes on and to support it. The teacher-parent interview furnishes a line of communication with the parents, forming one connecting link between school and home. It is a means of letting the parents know what goes on, of helping them to understand why things are done as they are, of interpreting the methods of teaching, of learning in turn their feelings about this and that, of picking up comments about what they do like and don't like, of hearing their suggestions about one thing and another.

It makes for good will for parents to know what goes on, to feel that there is willingness that they *should* know what happens in their child's room, to know that the teacher is ready to take the time and trouble to tell them and to listen to what they have to say about it. It makes for good will for them to feel that the school really cares about the individual children; that it cares how they get along not only in their school work but in all of their relationships. Often a teacher who talks with the parents, explaining here, interpreting there, giving and asking for help, little realizes that each interview can add to this good will which is the very basis of the administrator's public relations program, the basis for the parents' acceptance and support of the school. It is good for a teacher to recognize this.

It is good for the teacher to recognize, too, that the everyday explanations of new things going on, which it is so natural to speak of, can be very vital and important from the administrator's point of view. It is those little explanations, freely and willingly given in all the detail that the parents want, that takes them along in the school's thinking about the things that make the school better for their children. A teacher often does not realize how much thought the administrator must always give to being sure that there is no great gap between what the school does and what the parents feel happy about its doing. The interviews with parents can be a big help in seeing to it that any gap is bridged over quickly.

It is natural that the teacher should see the interviews with

parents primarily from the angle of how they help her with her teaching. That is important from the point of view of the administrator, too, since one of his greatest concerns, of course, is to have top-notch teaching in his school. Just as the interviews are a help to the teacher in her teaching, they are a help to the administrator in his guidance of the school as a whole.

When a teacher asks, "Why have interviews?" the answer has to do with better and more satisfying teaching, with the friendly feelings that are built up, with the broadened understanding of people that results, with the satisfaction of touching other people's lives with helpfulness, with the deepened enjoyments that others' interests and experiences bring to one's own living, and with the enrichment that results from coming close to the thinking of many people. Teacher-parent interviewing can be a great help in teaching, and it is sure to bring rich personal rewards.

2. Any teacher can interview

EXPERIENCE COVERING MANY YEARS HAS CONVINCED the authors that any teacher who wants to can carry on the kind of interviews discussed in this book. We have seen many teachers do so under all sorts of conditions, so we know it can be done.

1. It is natural to talk with parents.

At first thought it might seem that the younger the child is the more natural it is to get together immediately, because of all the details there are for the teacher to speak about and because the parents want to feel sure that the teacher will take good care of their youngster. It is just as natural for the parents to want to know what kind of person is teaching their child as it is for the teacher to want to know the child's parents. A teacher might be surprised to know that a parent's casual visits soon after school starts—to leave a message for the youngster, to bring a sweater, or to ask some question—often are excuses to get a look at the teacher rather than any great need for doing the errand. Of

course they want to know what the teacher is like. Isn't that the person they are going to be hearing about every day of the school year? When a teacher is alert to all those little feelers that parents put out, the way for interviews is already open. It is just as natural for the teacher to want to get the parents sorted out, to get an idea of whether they are people who are going to be easy to get along with or on the fussy side, and to know what they look like so that she can speak to them on the street.

All of this is in the beginning of the year, but interviews will be even more natural as the year moves along, because both teacher and parents will be concerned with how the youngster is getting along. There will be all sorts of school happenings to be talked about, and things that have a bearing on school doings will occur at home. Parents almost always have something to tell about Johnny's music lessons and whether he will or won't practice, or how he does or doesn't do his homework, or about weekend trips or shopping expeditions, or the after-school work the youngster is doing, or the home responsibilities he does or doesn't take. When teen-age days come it is natural enough for parents to feel free to speak to the teacher about things they wouldn't mention except to one who knows and cares about the boy or girl—things such as dating and companions and the time of coming home at night.

Teachers can discuss what relation the happenings at home have to the child's behavior in school, and parents can see how school activities affect his home life. When teacher-parent interviews are thought of as conversations between the people who touch the child's life most closely, they will seem very natural.

2. For further encouragement.

One of the first things to do is to dispose of the fears that have a way of looming up and looking more formidable than they really are.

Many teachers have hesitated to start interviewing because they were uncertain of what to talk about and feared that the

18 ANY TEACHER CAN INTERVIEW

whole thing would fall flat because of lack of anything to say. Even teachers who have made the start often speak of this same fear. This may be because the things one really wants to talk about are little things, and it seems that anything to be called an interview should take up big things. One need never hesitate to talk about the little things. Daily living is made up of little things, and often some little thing is the key to the big one. Parents are concerned about the little things, too. As a matter of fact nothing that affects a child's living is really a little thing. Susie's thoughtfulness in getting the sewing machines ready for the day's work when she saw that the homemaking teacher had been delayed might have seemed a little thing to the teacher who mentioned it, but it may have been a big thing to the parent who heard of it. Perhaps that parent had wondered if Susie would ever do thoughtful things, and here was evidence that she would. The teacher has at hand all of the things that go on at school to talk about. They are things parents want to know about. Even though the child may have mentioned them, the teacher will speak of them from a different angle.

The teacher may wonder where to begin. Wherever she begins, one thing will lead to another and, before she knows it, the talking together is underway. Parents, by their comments and questions, will give a lead on what interests them most and what turn they would like the talk to take. This brings up another common fear, the fear that the parents will ask about something that the teacher cannot answer or that they will want some help she does not know how to give. No one can ever have all the answers about the best way to bring up children at home or the best way to help them at school. One of the big reasons for having teacher-parent interviews is to search together for the answers for that particular child. A teacher can feel confident of having much to bring to that search. She has all the knowledge about children in general that preparation for teaching has brought her: about their development, about their interests, about the whys and wherefores of behavior, and about the ways of helping them to learn the things they need to know. There is

the knowledge that she has of the given child in the schoolroom among his classmates; the knowledge of his schoolwork. All of this will give a teacher confidence that she has something to offer. Often it is a good idea to take time to think further about some question the parents ask. Everything does not have to be settled in one interview. There can be others. Parents usually respect the integrity that prevents hasty comments. If the matter turns out to be beyond the teacher's depth, help can be had from the administrator, or from specialists on the staff, if there are such. Sometimes she will say simply and directly that this is something with which she is not prepared to help.

One thing that often stands in the way of interviewing is the teacher's feeling that she is not temperamentally fitted for it: that she does not have a free, easy, outgoing manner; that she is not quick with words, that she does not meet people easily. Friendliness can be shown in many ways, and it is best shown in the way that is natural. There is no one way that is right. Parents can feel the friendliness that shines through a shy, reserved manner, and they soon know when there is genuine interest in their youngster no matter how the teacher speaks. Not being quick with words *can* be a real asset. It is something many teachers have to learn so that it is nothing to worry about. If thought is centered on the youngster and what is best for him and not on one's own feelings at the moment, ease in meeting people can grow as talks with parents continue. There is no special manner or tone for interviewing. Naturalness and simplicity will gain respect, and a teacher who really wants to talk with parents should just be natural and go ahead. There is no need to try to be someone else and no need for a teacher to hesitate about interviewing because she is not a certain type of individual.

3. An over-all look at interviewing helps.

This is often a big help in disposing of fears, in getting started, and in keeping on the track after the start is made.

The first thing is to set one's sights. In the kind of interviews

20 ANY TEACHER CAN INTERVIEW

we are discussing, the reason for teacher and parents talking together is the youngster. Other useful purposes are served at the same time, but the youngster is the focal point and it is because of him that there is an interview. The interview is not necessarily because he has a "problem," though he may have, nor because he is a "problem," though he may be. He is there and the school is for him. The teacher is there because of him. Teacher and parents are talking together because of concern with what he is getting out of school, how he feels about things, and what kind of person he is. He is the starting point of it all.

Thought naturally turns from the child to the other people concerned—the parents, the teacher, and of course the school administrator. As soon as one even mentions people, the way they feel about things looms up as important. This is important in any teacher-parent interview; so important that a teacher who begins by taking the feelings of people concerned into account is off to a good start. A wise teacher takes them into account first, last, and always.

What to talk about comes next in the over-all picture. Thinking about the feelings of the people concerned helps in knowing what to talk about, how much to say about it, when to wait for another time. A teacher who gets started on interviews has them in mind all the time. She soon gets the habit of thinking, "I must speak to Tommy's dad about that," or, "I know Jean's mother will want to hear of this," or, "This is something I want to ask Ted's parents about." Things to talk about fall rather naturally into groups such as these: the things the parents bring up and the things the teacher brings up; the things that have to do with school doings and those that have to do with home affairs; the things that are well done and those where help is needed. Among the school doings will be the work in school subjects, the relationships with other children, and the relationships with the teacher and other adults. Of course things to talk about do not stay grouped. They will all show up in almost every interview.

Then, as part of the picture, there are all the things that have to do with making talks together worth the time they take. Al-

though talking with parents is as natural as can be, good interviews do not just happen. There are many things to do to make sure that they will amount to something useful, things that are the means to the end of good interviewing. Many of them are details of planning so that everyone is comfortable. Others have to do with the relationships with the parents; things to do and things not to do.

Then the interview happens. There is the youngster that the teacher and parents care about. They want to talk together about him, and there is plenty to talk about. Something useful comes out of it and teacher and parents are glad for the time together.

Keeping an over-all picture of interviewing in mind often helps in making it an orderly sort of thing instead of a hit-or-miss affair.

4. Now is the best time to start.

The sooner one starts the sooner one is on the way to better understanding of the youngsters. Many teachers are often well started before they realize that what they have been doing is really interviewing. For example, Don's dad meets the high school shop teacher on the street and they start talking about Don's desire to set up a shop in the basement at home. Dad mentions the equipment they already have and the teacher speaks of the lathe Don told him he wanted. Dad asks where to get one, and as he pulls out a notebook to take the address, he mentions how glad he is that Don has this bent, that he himself always wanted to do that sort of thing but had no knack for it, that he's happy to have Don working at home and not running the streets. The teacher speaks of some of the work he has done in shop and says, "Why not come over some day and see the shop," adding that maybe the three of them could look over the equipment to see what else to get. There has been one interview, a short one, and the way is open for another. Many interviews start as easily as that.

There seems no point in waiting to begin. While one waits.

22 ANY TEACHER CAN INTERVIEW

things that it would be helpful to say and to hear are unsaid and unheard. Even though it seems there will not be time to talk with all of the parents, one may as well begin and do what it is possible to do. At least the start will have been made. A teacher who starts will probably not stop, but will find ways of doing more. Many teachers have found that interviewing is such a help to teaching that they would not do without it.

5. Keep on and learn more.

One of the satisfying things about this kind of interviewing is that the more one does of it the more one learns about it, and each bit of learning helps make the next interview better. We have seen teachers learn. We have seen them afraid to start, yet wanting to, and finally making the plunge. We have seen them timid, still uncertain, but reaching out to parents with friendliness, with the humble willingness to learn from them, with the fervent wish to do anything possible to help the youngster. We have seen them grow in confidence and skill and in understanding and insight. We have seen them make mistakes and learn from the mistakes. We have done such learning ourselves. We find as we talk it over that each of us made a start at it without knowing much about it. It helped in teaching and we went on and learned as we went. We made mistakes. Each of us can tell of times when we talked too much or too little or were too sure of the answers or did not have any answer at all. Each of us has given advice when we were in no position to advise and, in due time, learned that talking together with parents does not call for advice-giving; that only they can decide what they will do. We learned as we interviewed, and we know full well the satisfaction that the learning brings. We have felt it ourselves and we have watched others as they have found it.

A teacher is wise to put to use whatever help lies at hand that will deepen the understanding of people, that will broaden the knowledge of children, that will add in any way to the skill in

interviewing. Interviewing in other fields has many suggestions for interviewing in this one. Even though the things discussed are different, one can pick up useful hints on the method of interviewing. Current books, magazines, and films put out by educational groups are fruitful sources for coming to a better understanding of people. It is all grist to the teacher's mill. So is the help that lies as close at hand as the administrator's office.

Often a teacher hesitates to bother the administrator about whether it is best to ask the parent to come to school about a given matter or for the teacher to go to the home, what will be the wisest thing to say about the question the parent raised and will come back later to talk about, whether the teacher should see the parents together or separately, or whatever other matter it is that the teacher is wondering about. In all probability the administrator would be only too glad to talk it over. He well may have facts that the teacher does not know about which would help decide the matter, or a point of view the teacher has not thought of which would give new light. Often it is his support and encouragement that gives the needed confidence to go ahead.

The needed help may come through a talk, arranged by the administrator, with another teacher who has handled a similar problem. Frequently, by turning to the art teacher or the music director or the gym instructor, the teacher can round out the picture of the child's school activities and so can come to the interview with pretty complete knowledge of how all of his teachers see him. There may be some other specialist on the staff to whom one can turn for help: maybe a nurse, a guidance counsellor, a social worker, or a clinical psychologist. Of course, if the matter is one that lies outside the teacher's province, it will be turned over to a specialist. Even when it is something for the teacher to go on with, the specialist is usually glad enough to talk it over and to offer suggestions. The administrator may suggest community agencies where one can get certain specialized help. A teacher should make sure of the administrator's

24 ANY TEACHER CAN INTERVIEW

approval before consulting with such agencies. He knows the over-all picture as the teacher never can, and so knows what is for the best good of the school as a whole.

Perhaps the school is one where the administrator feels that interviews are so important that there are teacher workshops on the matter, which give the chance to hear others' ideas and to help others by passing along one's own ideas. Probably the administrator will have seen to it that the teachers' library is well stocked with books that give depth and perspective to the interviewing—books on child development, on understanding people, on adolescent psychology, and the like. No doubt he would welcome suggestions for any books that the teacher would like to have at hand.

Any teacher who wants to do interviewing can learn to do it well. The chapters that follow are designed to help along the learning.

PART TWO

Feelings that underlie all teacher-parent interviews

Feelings will be discussed here, before anything more is said about what to take up in an interview or how to hold one, because the feelings of the people involved are the key to it all. They color everything that is said and done. They determine what will result from what is said and done. They are therefore potent and important. They need to be recognized and understood and taken into account, so they come first here as they should come first in thinking about any interview.

When a teacher and parents come together to talk over things that have to do with the youngster, they bring with them feelings about the child himself, about children in general, about themselves, about parents and teachers in general, about how they feel about having an interview, and so on. The child's feelings are in the picture, too, even though he is not present at the interview. They are present as they are known to parents and teacher, or as they are guessed at in the effort to understand the youngster. They are there as expressed in the youngster's behavior, for it is in his feelings that the behavior has its roots.

Sometimes the feelings of teacher and parents come out in words. Sometimes they show only in tone and gesture. Sometimes they do not come out openly at all. The child's feelings may be spoken of in detail, or they may not. It may be hard at first to recognize the feelings unless they are plainly evident. The teacher can grow in alert-

ness and sensitivity to the little things that parents say and do to reveal theirs. She can grow, too, in sensitivity to what her own feelings are and in willingness to take them out and look at them. This sensitivity in discerning feelings is perhaps more important than it appears at first glance. Without it one is more or less working along in the dark, never quite knowing whether or not the help one tries to give will fit. With the recognition of the feelings and the effort to understand them, there is a basis for giving help that fits. Sometimes a teacher will be on the lookout for certain feelings and will recognize these as significant without realizing that there are many others that are just as important and that should receive as much attention.

Mentioned here are some that one may safely assume are present in every interview, on the surface or below it, spoken or unspoken, and always with great differences from parent to parent, from teacher to teacher, and from child to child. The child's feelings are mentioned first, because it is for his well-being that teacher and parents are talking together; because it is so easy (and so dangerous) to try to do things to his behavior without considering the feelings which prompt it; and because so often he cannot put his feelings into words for himself, and one must be very discerning to know what they are.

3. The child's feelings

A CHILD FEELS DEEPLY ABOUT MANY THINGS. The fact that often he cannot put the feelings into words does not necessarily mean that they are any less strong. There are feelings about himself, his home, his parents, the neighborhood in which he lives and the companions there, his teachers past and present, the school in general and his classmates, and all his friends.

The parents bring to the interview whatever their knowledge may be of the child's feelings about these things. There will be some who are very sensitive to their child's feelings and who will speak of this incident or that as evidence that the feeling is thus and so. Some may show a warm close understanding without pointing to anything specific. Some few may take feelings for granted, with little to say about them and apparently little interest in looking into them.

The teacher will take into the interview a knowledge of the child's feelings as they are revealed at school, often in ways of which the child is totally unaware: in a passing comment during some class discussion; in surprise or disapproval of the way some-

28 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

thing is being done; in a quick, "Oh, I'd love to show that to my mother."

The parents, of course, have a knowledge of the child's feelings that is different from the way the teacher knows them, because they are with the child all the days of all the years in a different relationship. By the same token, the teacher may have some knowledge of the child's feelings, that the parents do not have. It is nothing unusual for a child to reveal at school feelings that would astonish the parents. A real respect for the child will guide a teacher in knowing when it is wise to tell of these and when to keep silent.

1. How a child feels about himself.

As a child goes about his business of everyday living he builds up feelings about himself. Each time something happens or a remark is made some feeling is strengthened or deepened. It may be changed ever so slightly, and, as time goes on and other things happen, the changed feeling may overshadow some of the ones that went before. Before long it becomes evident enough, by a child's actions or his comments, just about what sort of a picture he has of himself, even though he may not put it in words.

The feelings that the youngsters in a group have about themselves are one important key to understanding why this one shrinks back from every new experience and that one rushes out to meet it; why one looks askance at every adult overture of friendliness and another reaches out in quick response to it; why one rarely makes a move without being sure it is what the adult wants and another plunges into whatever interests him regardless.

It is not always easy to get at what a child's feelings about himself are, because these are feelings that lie deep and to find them one must earn his way into a child's innermost thoughts and emotions. Often, too, words or looks or actions that would tell the story slip by unnoticed until one becomes alert to what they mean. When the teacher becomes aware of them the picture becomes clearer and behavior that perhaps was puzzling and

baffling becomes easy to understand. A child's feelings about himself color everything he does. They affect all of his relationships. They determine to a large extent his outlook upon all of his experiences. They may very well be at the bottom of arithmetic well or poorly done. They may account for his willingness to stay behind the scenes and draw the curtains for the group's dramatic skit while flatly refusing to do anything that calls for facing the audience. They may account too, for avoidance of anything *but* facing the audience. They may explain the ease and confidence with which chairmanship of the student group is accepted, or the fear of attempting to carry the smallest responsibility as a committee member.

A child's feelings about himself, his regard for himself as an individual, his feelings about his place in a group, his feelings about his importance in the scheme of things, all grow out of the things that are said to him and the way they are said from baby days on; out of the way his overtures are accepted or rejected or treated with indifference; out of the ways his efforts and accomplishments and enterprises are looked upon and commented on; out of the general esteem in which he is held; out of the things he is told about himself.

Any teacher-parent discussion of a youngster's accomplishments; his relationships with others; his responsibility, dependability, initiative, and independence are likely to be pretty empty unless it takes into account his feelings about himself. Sometimes the teacher can give a parent some new insight. Often the parent's explanation can help the teacher to a deeper understanding. Even if the feelings are not brought into the open and even if they are not seen as a basic cause of behavior, they are there underlying any interview.

2. How a child feels about his parents.

These feelings, too, are a factor in the interview, and understanding them is an important part of understanding the youngster.

30 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

Basically, a child's parents are the most wonderful people in the world to him; at least they are in the beginning. It is natural that he should reach out to them with spontaneous love, and, given a ghost of a chance, he will. It is natural that he should take the things they do and their ways of doing them without a question. They are the only ways he knows. It is true that he may have moments of rebelling against one thing or another; moments of anger in which he strikes out at the people who make him do what he, momentarily at least, does not want to do. These are usually passing feelings, with the over-all one being an acceptance of the parents' way of doing as the way it should be done; acceptance of what they say as right or wrong; acceptance of what they say about anything as the final word.

This acceptance will probably remain until the time when a growing independence demands that he criticize their actions, their speech, their appearance, their points of view on just about everything. The criticism is probably a means of registering the fact that growing up entitles one to independent ideas. It may be evidence of an awakening awareness to other ways of doing than those that have heretofore been accepted and, for the moment at least, a feeling that these new ways are preferable. Often it is the youngster's very devotion and intense desire to look upon his parents as the example of all that anyone should be that prompts the criticism. Even though dubbed "old fashioned" and "cockeyed" in the privacy of home, they and their ideas will probably be staunchly defended against outside attacks and competition. It is easy to understand a child's great desire to be proud of his parents, and the deep satisfaction it brings when he *can* be. They are the focal point of his world. They spell his security and often a child maintains his pride in them and his loyalty to them in spite of obstacles that may seem pretty formidable to outsiders.

Mixed in with these feelings, though, there often are others quite different: feelings of irritation when demands are insistent, impelling, sometimes even nagging; feelings of anger when desires are constantly thwarted; feelings of resentment when wishes and opinions are ignored; feelings of hostility and even hatred for the

ones that do the nagging or thwart the desires or ignore the opinions. These feelings may be fleeting, with the others far overbalancing them. Or these and the others may just about balance, so that the youngster hardly knows which way he feels. The uncomfortable feelings may so far overbalance the others that the love and pride and loyalty that the child would like to feel are all but forgotten. Since the feelings of resentment, anger, and hostility are not the ones a child is expected to feel for his parents, it is not unusual for them to get pushed back out of sight. They may be camouflaged by an overlay of smooth, sweet behavior, with only the occasional eruptions severe enough to suggest more beneath the surface than appears.

Whatever a child's feelings for his parents may be—whatever the combinations of love and dislike, of acceptance and wish to push away, of pride and shame, of loyalty and the lack thereof—they have significance for the teacher who would understand the youngster. They are underlying factors in any interview. In the course of an interview, the parents may speak of the child's feelings toward them; perhaps different feelings for one than he has for the other. They may tell how these feelings have held over the years; how from early days on the girl has been her father's shadow and how she now compares all her boy friends with him; how the boy, now a football star in high school, has always been devoted to Mother, bringing her candy and flowers on her birthday; how the boy and his Dad fish together and talk over all sorts of things; how even though the girl is twelve now the three of them, when her bedtime comes, clear up whatever has been bothersome during the day.

A sensitive teacher will be quick to catch significant hints of the child's feelings as indicated in the incidents related by the parents. These little details often help to fill in the picture already sketched in outline through things the child has said and done at school. The teacher's picture may vary in detail, or even in outline, from that of the parent. It may be a picture that, in loyalty to the youngster, cannot be disclosed.

Sometimes the incidents that the teacher can relate or com-

32 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

ments that can be repeated will bring encouragement and reassurance to parents who have been wondering if they were quite making the grade with the youngster. Even when they know that they are and when they have no question of the child's feeling for them, it can be very reassuring to be told of the boy's proud recounting of some accomplishment of "My Dad," and of the warm tone in which those words, "My Dad" are always spoken; or to hear of the girl's confident quoting, "My Mother says."

3. How a child feels about his home.

Closely akin to a child's feelings about his parents are those about his home. It is pretty safe to assume, until proved otherwise, that a child accepts his home as it is without much question, that he looks upon it as his secure haven, and that he bestows upon it his pride and loyalty. For the most part home, like parents, is taken for granted in the beginning.

It is when the days come of "going over to Mary's to play," or "stopping by Jim's after school," or of having lunch with this friend and staying overnight with another that a youngster may begin to notice differences between the ways things look or the ways things are done in the homes visited and in his own. Maybe what he sees at his friend's intrigues him. The double-decker bed in Jim's room may suggest that one would be nice in his own. Having a room to herself may never have occurred to Jennie until she saw Mary's private domain; then she may wish that the younger sister or brother who has shared her room were elsewhere.

There may be no very deep feeling about things that are noticed in other homes until the day comes when, by comparison, one's own home may look shabby, or less up-to-date, or for some reason not quite what one wants friends to see. Even then objections to furniture that is dubbed archaic, demands for changes in ways of doing this or that, pleas for wallpaper instead of tinted walls or vice-versa, and the like stem largely from the child's

basic desire to be proud of his home; from the fundamental need to feel that it is the best of all homes.

A teacher who is aware of the potency and significance of a child's feelings about his home will be alert to every reference that gives a clue to those feelings as the parents see them and, in turn, to pass on to them, when it seems wise, whatever may have been gleaned at school that reveals those feelings.

4. How a child feels about the neighborhood and community in which he lives.

One can scarcely think of a child's feelings about his home without considering the neighborhood which is a setting for it and the community of which it is a part.

Just as a child takes his home for granted at first, so is he likely to take the neighborhood for granted until the day comes when he can make comparisons and look at that, too, with critical eyes. The fact of its being taken for granted does not mean that it will be looked upon and lived in without feelings—far from it. Every detail of it eventually becomes familiar: all of its sights and sounds and smells; all of its interesting spots to be poked into and explored; all of its buildings, with their known or unknown occupants.

Perhaps it is a neighborhood of homes where the same families live year after year and where the child grows up knowing and being known by everyone up and down the street. Or it may be a neighborhood where the families move frequently; where the youngster is always getting acquainted with newcomers or is himself the newcomer, with a whole new territory to explore. It may be an apartment house neighborhood, where acquaintances are made in the elevator, in the lobby, in the nearby park, along the street, and in the shops. It may be a rural neighborhood, where sights and sounds and smells are of a different sort, where the spaces across which one may look are wide, where the places to be explored are in the fields or woods, and where acquaintances are scattered.

34 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

Whatever the neighborhood may be, a child will have feelings about it, just as he will have feelings about the larger community of which the neighborhood is a part; the community where the family goes to shop, where the post office, the railroad station, and the fire house are found. First one part of the community then another becomes familiar as the youngster goes along with Mother or Dad at first, then on his own. He comes to be a part of it as he uses the library, goes to the Scout Hall or the Y, finds his name in the paper as winner of this or that award, and plays on one team or another.

The child may like the neighborhood and feel a part of it, knowing all that goes on, being interested in the new house going up, the tree being cut down, or the sidewalk being laid. He may be on friendly terms with this adult and that one, and he may play with the crowd of youngsters of assorted ages. Or he may be in the neighborhood but not a part of it, feeling no special friendliness for any of the adults and remaining on the fringe of the group of children.

Whatever the feelings are they are part of the teacher's business to know, so far as they can be discovered. They will certainly have to do with the things teacher and parents will talk about.

5. How a child feels about other children.

A child's companions usually fall roughly into two groups, neighborhood companions and school companions. Among these there will probably be some who are mere acquaintances and others who are best friends. He will get along well with some and not so well with others. Perhaps there will be one who strikes terror to his soul, whom he dreads to meet. Perhaps he feels easy and comfortable with them all—sure of a welcome, ready to give and take, perfectly able to hold his (or her) own come what may, entirely able and willing to raise a voice in self-defense when need be, but still on easy-going terms with all. There may be instead less sureness of his place in the group, more drawing away when

things go wrong, a longing to get into the midst of things without knowing how. There may be feelings of loneliness, or perhaps belligerence and resentment and a wish to strike out at something. There may be a feeling of closeness to one child or another, or perhaps a great desire to be best friends with one who does not respond. Maybe there is an attachment to an older child who offers protection, or perhaps to a younger one who can be dominated.

Teacher and parents are wise to discuss a child's feelings about other children. Parents see the youngster in his relationships at home and in the neighborhood, away from school. They know his best friends, if his home is open to them. They know how the friendships have changed and they know the ups and downs of enjoyments and difficulties. They know of homecomings from vacation, with the excited dash next door to tell George or Sue all about it. They know, perhaps, of enterprises carried on in great secrecy, with giggles and promises not to tell; of hours of study together; perhaps of quarrels that brought bitter tears and of times when jealousy reared its head. A teacher sees the youngster in his school relationships in a way the parents never can; sees how he finds his place in the group or does not; sees which children in the group attract or repel him; sees the means he takes to gain the friendships he wants. Feelings about other children are a powerful factor in all of a child's living. They affect all of his school work right on through the grades and the thought and energy he can put into his work. In short, they affect his whole pattern of living.

6. How a child feels about his teacher.

Parents are likely to come to the interview very well aware of how their child feels about the teacher. There may have been a time of hurt feelings over what seemed to the youngster to be a brush-off, or of annoyance about some remark that seemed belittling, or of downright anger over some real or fancied injustice or unfairness, or of great indignation because of

36 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

some alleged playing of favorites, or of resentment because the homework assignments seem unreasonable to the youngster. Whether or not the parents mention such matters in the interview, they are there in thought to affect what they do say.

On the other hand, the child may look upon the teacher as the final word of authority in all matters. He may feel complete trust and confidence in the teacher's fairness and justice. He may have a very comfortable sureness of the teacher's willingness to try to understand any situation that comes up, or there may be sureness on some of these things and not so much sureness on others. Whatever the feelings are, the parents will probably know them, and their own will be inevitably colored by them. A teacher who genuinely wants to get at what the child feels, to get behind the front that may be put up at school, can pick up a good many clues during the course of an interview.

Sometimes parents are pretty cautious about openly revealing what they know, fearing that the teacher will be upset and annoyed and will take it out on the child. Or they may be so disturbed by the child's unhappy feelings that they will throw caution to the winds and speak their minds. The teacher may have had an inkling that all was not well and will be glad to know what it is all about. Sometimes there are explanations to be made. What the parent says may be news to the teacher who had no idea that some remark made in passing had hurt a sensitive child. A parent can very quickly sense the genuineness of the teacher's surprise and regret, and will then probably be quite ready to explain the whys and wherefores of the youngster's reactions.

The teacher may be surprised to hear that she is more or less on a pedestal in the child's opinion, that she holds a place in the youngster's thought which perhaps she little dreamed. The parent may tell of some word of commendation that the teacher does not even remember speaking, but that sent the youngster home in a glow of happiness. Or it may have been a bit of encouragement given at a moment of need, or the willingness to talk over something troubling the youngster that made both child and

parent feel very appreciative. Often it leaves a teacher feeling very humble to find how important is the part she unwittingly plays in a child's life. In rare instances things may be said which will make her realize that here is a child for whom the teacher is the only source for whatever encouragement, appreciation, and love he is to get.

With any opportunity at all, a child is usually very ready to give his teacher affection and confidence and trust. Some start off a bit cautiously, being sure of their ground before going all out in friendliness. Others take it for granted from the first that they will like and be liked. Some accept the teacher from the start as more or less infallible. For most children there is a time when whatever "my teacher" says is the final word, parents notwithstanding. This is very comforting and flattering for the teacher. It is not always so comforting to the parents, who perhaps until then have been almost infallible. In an interview the teacher may want to speak of these feelings as a part of the growing-up process, making it clear that there is no wish or intention to be the parents' rival, or to usurp any parental prerogative, or to take any position of infallibility.

Later in the grades, the feeling that the teacher is infallible is modified, and the youngster begins to feel that there are some areas in which he could give the teacher pointers. Often it becomes the thing to be very critical, at least among the gang, though privately and individually each may look upon the teacher with both affection and respect. However, a teacher, like the parents, may as well recognize that a child's feelings are usually mixed: feelings of friendliness and liking mixed with feelings of annoyance and irritation; feelings of trust and confidence mixed with feelings of doubt about whether anyone who would ask this or that should be trusted; feelings of deep admiration mixed with great dislike of some mannerism or disgust with some real or fancied weakness. Usually a child's feelings (anyone's, for that matter) are neither all one thing nor all the other, and a teacher does well to know this and accept it. At any rate, whatever a child's feelings about the teacher, they will be very

38 THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

much a part of any interview, both in the parents' thought and in the teacher's. Whether spoken of or held in silence, they must be reckoned with.

All of a child's feelings are present in any interview. They are part of the child. They color everything he thinks and says and does. They are the driving force behind his behavior. Recognizing and understanding them is the basic first step in understanding the child. It is only by recognizing and understanding feelings that one can ever hope to find the path to follow in guiding the child—otherwise one will be stumbling in the dark. To try to talk with parents about a child without considering his feelings as a basic factor in all that he says and does is only to speak superficially, for they are the why and wherefore. This is not to say that one can always know what they are. It is not so easy as that. The search to know and understand is a never-ending one. It is one in which teacher and parents would benefit by joining forces.

4. The parents' feelings

SOME PARENTS MAY VERBALIZE THEIR FEELINGS glibly; others may reveal them in more indirect ways. Some may bring them out into the open very willingly; while others seek to hide them, either consciously or unconsciously. Whether spoken or not, they are there; all the feelings about their child, about their home, about themselves, about the teacher and the school. They are there to be discerned, considered, understood, respected. They are there, playing their part in what is said, in what is accepted and rejected. They determine the whole color and tone of the interview.

1. How the parents feel about the child.

A teacher does well to be very alert to the parents' feelings about the child, but at the same time to be watchful not to jump to conclusions and not to be hasty in condemning if something shows up that seems less than the love and devotion that children thrive upon. It usually helps to remember that parents' feelings, like those of the children and everyone else, are likely to be mixed. Even the ordinary run of parents, who love their children deeply and try to do the best they can by them, could probably

40 THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

tell of moments of irritation and of times when they were glad enough to ship them off to Grandmother's for a few days, and then just as glad to have them back.

Feelings of the parents of any group of children are likely to run the gamut, from deep and abiding affection on the part of most to perhaps positive and fairly consistent dislike on the part of a few. The teacher may only guess at the dislike and may wonder whether or not the suspicion, raised by some comment or perhaps only intuitively felt, is well founded. It is understandable that a parent might hesitate to speak openly of disliking his own child. Often the realization that here is real dislike and not merely surface irritation comes as a shock to a teacher, bringing with it a baffled wonderment as to what in the world she can do about it and a great flood of sympathy for the child. If the youngster is in the upper grades or high school, she may wonder how he has coped with the dislike all these years, whether he realizes that it is there, whether he knows what he has missed, and how he has made his adjustment to it. Even the suspicion that the dislike is there may be the thread that will unravel all sorts of puzzling things in the youngster's behavior.

Instead of actual dislike, the teacher may find indifference; a mild feeling that the youngster is something of a nuisance, or perhaps that he stands in the way of things more glamorous than looking after a child. Some parents may take the youngster for granted, loving him but giving no great amount of thought to what is best for him and what is not. They may just go on from day to day giving good physical care and letting the rest of the bringing up take care of itself. Some may be too busy to be bothered, leaving the child's care to a nurse when he is little and to the youngster himself as he gets older. There may be some who envelop the child in such a hovering, smothering protectiveness that the teacher will wonder whether this apparently devoted affection, which never lets the child out of sight, is really an expression of the love it is supposed to be or whether it comes out of feelings less useful for the youngster; perhaps from an actual wish that he were not there.

Feelings such as these, if they are perceived, do have great significance in a teacher's understanding of the youngster and of the relationships that are so much a part of his living. But recognizing them is one thing and doing something about them is another. They lie deep, and bringing them up into the open may often lead to complicated situations, which might well cause a teacher to hesitate to meddle with them. Delving into their cause and cure, if it is to be done, is a matter for the guidance counsellor or the clinical psychologist rather than the teacher.

Most of the parents in the group will probably feel that the youngster is the most precious thing they have; that he is well worth any time and trouble and worry and thought that it may take to bring him up well. Pride and joy in a child brings with it willingness, even eagerness, to talk about him, to tell of his interests, to hear and to tell about his accomplishments, to relate the things he says and does, to speak of hopes and plans for him, to tell of the enjoyment of him. Feelings of anxiety, worry, and concern about the child, and often these are mixed in with the others, will also bring willingness and eagerness to talk about the youngster. Whatever the feelings are, there they are, to be discerned and understood so far as one can.

This discerning and understanding the parents' feelings for the child is a key to understanding the youngster and what he does. The way the parents feel about him largely determines the way they see him, the way they interpret his behavior, and the way they respond to what the teacher has to say. They see him in the light of their feelings about his coming, about him as a baby and a little child, about him as he grows, about the way he looks, about his manner and his way of speaking, about what he says and what he does. They see him in the light of all the feelings of anxiety, hope, fear, and enjoyment that have surrounded his bringing up. They see him in light of their reactions to what relatives and friends and all who meet him say about him and the way they act toward him.

Sometimes the eagerness for a child to achieve and accomplish leads to overestimating what he can do. Sometimes a sense of

42 THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

urgency creeps into the feelings of pride and satisfaction in accomplishment; sometimes a bit of impatience, a little push for greater achievement. Sometimes there are feelings that the child can do no wrong; sometimes a nagging anxiety that he may not quite live up to expectations and perhaps keen disappointment when he doesn't. Perhaps there is blame because the child hasn't quite made the grade, or perhaps outspoken pride because he has.

Whatever the parents' feelings about the child may be, they are likely to be deep and intense and the bonds close and strong, even when the feelings are more negative than positive. They are determining factors in all the child is and does. Spoken or unspoken, evident or not, they underlie every interview. A teacher will know them only in part, even though each interview brings new insight. Perhaps those of one parent will be better known than those of the other. At any rate, known or unknown, they will be there.

2. How the parents feel about their home.

Whatever the home is, it is theirs. It expresses their thought. It has grown out of their thinking and feeling, out of their likes and dislikes, out of their plans and ambitions or lack of them. Simple or elaborate, meagerly or luxuriously furnished, dirty or clean, poorly kept or showing thoughtful care, it is part of them. It is their kingdom, the place which no outsider may enter except by their consent. The teacher may never see it, may know little about its outward appearance, may be able only to guess at what it means to the different ones in the family. Even so, the youngster brings to school not only his own feelings about it, but those of his parents as well, for those feelings affect the whole manner of his living. So, they are of concern to a teacher.

In this, as in everything else, all sorts of variations are likely to be found in the group. Some children will be from homes where the parents feel that home is to be used; that comfort and freedom to do what one wants to do comes before meticulous order and prescribed arrangement of furniture. Others will be from homes

where the urge to have everything spotlessly clean and in never-disturbed order so far transcends all else that a child has difficulty finding a place to carry on his enterprises without being stopped with admonitions not to make a mess or to clean up that already made. Some will be children of parents who feel the home is the child's as much as theirs, who want him to bring his friends there, who feel that home should be a place where a child can be happy and content and a refuge in time of trouble. These may feel that the home is for all to keep up, with the children sharing responsibility as well as enjoyment.

Some will be from homes where religion is an integral part of daily living, where parents feel that a spiritual outlook on life is the most important thing they can give the child. Others may be from homes where religion plays little part. Some may be children of parents who give no special thought to home, one way or the other; who have little feeling about it except as a place to sleep and to eat; a convenient place from which to come and go. Some may have had hopes for their home which have not materialized, and there may be feelings of disappointment or perhaps embarrassment and a bit of shame that things are not better than they are. Or there may be happiness and satisfaction every time they turn in at the gate, and a warm glow of gladness for this spot that is their own.

Some will like the neighborhood in which the home is set and the community of which it is a part. Some will wish they could get out of it, maybe feeling that it is rough and no place to bring up children, or so run down that it offers little chance of making a nice home. Some may have lived there since they themselves were children, and no other place would seem like home. Some will speak of liking the neighbors; others will relate their troubles with the woman who yells at the children and the man whose chickens scratch up the garden and the family where the children run wild. Some will feel that the larger community, too, is a good town to live in; others will not. Some will feel a part of it, busy with its affairs, proud of its new streets, the new fire equipment, the remodelled buildings, the services it offers. Others

44 THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

will look at it as if from the outside, taking little part in it and criticizing the way it is run. Whatever the feelings may be, it is a good idea to have an eye open for them, for the children from the different homes live with those feelings. They are a part of them.

3. How the parents feel about themselves.

The parents will bring their feelings about themselves to every interview. They may feel that they are not being quite equal to the job, and may wonder whether the teacher thinks so too; they may feel discouragement that, with all their efforts, the youngster still does things they wish he would get over; they may feel bafflement over bits of behavior they do not quite understand and yet want to do the right thing about; they may feel disappointment that circumstances seem to prevent their doing all they would like to for the youngster.

Curiously enough, a teacher seems to hear more often of the negative feelings than of the parents being happy and satisfied and proud of the job they are doing. Perhaps it is because parents usually have their youngster's interests so much at heart and want so much to do the best they can for him that anything they do seems to them to fall short of the mark. Perhaps it is because all too often the talking with them is almost exclusively about what is wrong with the youngster, thus by implication focusing attention on their failures in his upbringing rather than on the success side of the story. Whatever the reasons, parents' feelings about themselves are often those of anxiety that what they have done is wrong, of guilt at not being better at the job, of self-condemnation for things done or left undone. Many teachers can tell of the surprise and pleasure with which parents receive comments about what a good job they do. There are those, of course, who do feel sure of themselves, some with good reason and some without, and those who have no special feeling about it one way or the other; who just go their way, neither expecting the best nor fearing the worst. One may find those who have feelings of

resentment at being parents at all, feelings of being imposed upon because of having to take the responsibilities of rearing a youngster, feelings of boredom or actual annoyance with all the daily details of upbringing, feelings that the best years of life are being wasted in being tied down to the youngster.

There will be many—probably the great majority—whose ambition is to be a good parent and who willingly make an effort to be the kind of person their child can respect and look up to, seeing themselves as setting the pace for the youngster. Many will feel that being a parent is well worth any sacrifice it may entail; that it opens up enjoyments not to be had otherwise; that it is just plain good fun despite all the moments of anxiety and the hard work and the times of discouragement and the occasions when tempers snap and things momentarily blow up.

Much will probably come to light about the parents' feelings about themselves as people, aside from being parents: their feelings about their accomplishments in making a living and keeping up a home; about their ambitions and how these have or have not been achieved; about their enjoyments, the things they like to do; about their own upbringing and the effect it has had on them; about their feelings toward their own parents; about their own appearance. The first gray hair may come up for comment, or mention may be made, with great satisfaction, of being often mistaken for the teen-ager's sister or brother instead of mother or dad. Maybe there are regretful feelings that the years are creeping up; that things have been missed that one would like to have done. Maybe, instead, the feelings are those of happy appreciation of the fullness and richness of living, with confidence that the coming years will continue to bring it.

4. How the parents feel about the teacher.

Parents will probably come to an interview with pretty well-established feelings about teachers in general and their child's present teacher in particular. Maybe they look upon all teachers with the same degree of awe that they had for their own teachers.

46 THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

Perhaps there is a carry-over feeling that all teachers are to be approached with caution, as potential enemies until proved otherwise. Maybe the feelings are happier ones rooted in memories of teachers who gave encouraging words when need be, who were ready with help over hard spots, who were always opening the way to enjoyable learnings, who could laugh when things were funny, who had all sorts of interesting things to tell, and who made school days happy days and seemed to want to do so.

Some parents may come to their interview already well acquainted with the child's teacher, some having little idea what the teacher is like, some knowing what to expect by hearsay from those who have had children in the room, some with a vague sort of picture made up of their youngster's fragmentary comments. There may be a bit of fear that would be surprising to the teacher, whose own knees are shaking a little. Often there is fear that the teacher will be critical or will ask too many questions or will be high hat. If the feelings about teachers in general are on the negative side, one can readily see why there may be great caution about letting down the barriers with any particular teacher, lest confidence be misplaced.

In any group, a majority of the parents are likely to feel real respect for the teacher. There is likely to be a general readiness to be friends, though for some it may be hard to get over the idea that a teacher is a bit different from other people; that she is not quite human, perhaps, and somewhat unapproachable. Some may feel more confidence in a married teacher than in an unmarried one; others may give it no thought. Some may hope their child will have a teacher who is young and gay, and others may feel that experience is greatly to be desired. It is common enough for some parents to have a few twinges of jealousy when the child scoffs at parental opinions with the finality of "My teacher says." The teacher does well to let them know that there is neither wish nor intent to compete with them.

As always, it is to be supposed that parents' feelings toward a teacher will be mixed ones, neither all one thing nor all the other; that there will be critical thoughts at times; that there may be

moments of annoyance; that there will be times of not agreeing. Be these as they may, there will ordinarily be great respect and deep confidence in what she can do for the youngster, faith in her willingness to do it, and a basic feeling of friendliness, though that friendliness may or may not be expressed. It all points up the importance of the interview, where teacher and parents can come to know each other, where understandings can be deepened, and where confidence can be built.

Then there are all of the parents' feelings about the school as a whole: what they like and do not like about it, the feelings about the principal and the superintendent, about the other teachers, about the playground and its equipment, about the lunchroom and the food that is served, about the school regulations and the appearance of the school building, and about the school taxes that have to be paid and what they feel they get for them. There are the feelings about the children who go to the school and the homes they come from, and whether they are looked upon as desirable companions. There are feelings about the school bus, if that is the way the children get there, about what goes on on the bus, and about the driver.

There are feelings about the interview itself: feelings perhaps of great appreciation for the opportunity to talk with the teacher, or of seeing no special reason to take the time for it when all is going well enough, or of resentment at being bothered. Perhaps there is genuine satisfaction that the school cares what goes on in the child's out-of-school life.

There are feelings about all sorts of things that are not directly related to school but that are nonetheless a part of the child's thinking and feeling, such as the feeling about pets and the part they play in a child's life, about an allowance and how it should be handled, about opportunities for the child to earn money, about the youngster's friends, about boy-girl friendships and dating and marriage. There are all the feelings about money and its importance, social position in the community, what is honest and what isn't, what is success and what is failure, what is worth striving for and what isn't, and so on.

48 THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

All of these feelings are involved in any interview. Some a teacher will know about, some can only be guessed at, some will never be known, but all of them are there, potent in their influence.

5. The teacher's feelings

FOR THE TEACHER WHO IS WILLING TO HUNT around, much information is available that will help her to understand her own feelings. The digging may turn up some surprises, but it is about the only way she can know why some remark of a parent calls forth resentment, or why some mannerism of another irritates and annoys, or why she feels comfortable and serene with certain ones and ready to explode with others.

It is out of feelings that the tone of voice comes—the tone that gets tight and brittle with one parent no matter what the effort to keep it otherwise, while with another it stays free and warm and easy with no conscious thought to make it so. It is out of feelings that manner and gestures come, even the way of sitting as the interview goes on, whether tense and stiff, holding in the critical comments with obvious effort, or relaxed and at ease, glad to talk about whatever there is to tell. It is out of feelings that there comes the manner and tone, even if not the words, that tell plainly how little the teacher thinks of a parent who would do the thing just described, or that tell just as plainly the acceptance of the parent without blame or condemnation.

50 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

Feelings shine through the words that are spoken and the manner of the speaking, and they easily can have more to do with the outcome of the interview than the words themselves. Thus the teacher's feelings, since they reach to all of the parents and all of the children, play a big part in the interviews and a teacher should know what they are. Perhaps as they are scrutinized some may be found that are not so useful as others and some that one could do better without. Fortunately, feelings can be changed as the effort is made to see things from the parent's point of view, as there is search for new facts with which to understand, as the urge to make the parents over is relaxed, as it is seen that there can be no *one* right way for bringing up youngsters. To sum it up, the teacher's own feelings are something to look into when starting off on interviews, and to keep on looking into as interviews go on.

1. How the teacher feels about the children.

First of all there are the feelings about children in general to be thought of—whether or not one really likes them, enjoys being with them, gets a thrill out of the things they do, gets excited over their achievements, and is quick to discern their need for encouragement or commendation or sympathy. Without basic feelings such as these, it seems that school days would be pretty dull for the teacher and pretty glum for the children.

Even with basic feelings of liking and enjoyment, teachers branch off in all directions in the ways of looking at children's behavior, in feelings about their rights as individuals, in respect for them as independently thinking people. Some are strong in their belief that whatever the behavior may be—no matter how reprehensible and annoying, no matter how cooperative and satisfying—there are causes for it that need to be understood. This leads to looking upon the youngsters with feelings of acceptance, instead of condemning and blaming when the behavior happens to run counter to what was hoped for. With the acceptance there is likely to go recognition of the youngster's right to

be the individual he is and the understanding that he can do no other than be the individual he is. Basic to this is respect for a child because he *is* an individual—a respect for him as a person, whether he be two or twenty, that precludes pushing him around or ever putting anything over on him just because one can. Not all teachers have these feelings about children. If one does not it is well to know it. It may explain, in part, why teaching is not being as happy an experience as it might be.

The teacher's feelings about children in general are, of course, the background for the feeling about any one child in particular. All of them, general and particular, will be around in every interview.

Any teacher who faces his feelings honestly knows that no matter how he may try to feel the same toward each child in the group, it just doesn't happen. There are those to whom one feels close and those to whom one does not. There are some that it is easy to like from the moment they walk in and some that it takes great effort to like. Behind feelings such as these, she will find others that explain them. Sometimes one carries over from childhood feelings of what is a nice child and what isn't, and those feelings may rear their heads when the "not nice" kind appears. Maybe the child does things that one was punished for, and seeing them again brings unpleasant feelings for the child doing them. Even so little a thing as the way hair grows, or a certain type of chin, or the cast in an eye, or even a name can call forth dislike that goes back to the boy or girl that always raised one's ire in the third or fourth or fifth grade. Feelings are curious things; they stay around a long time and bob up when least expected.

Parents can tell quickly if the teacher's feelings about a child are those of genuine interest, real liking, and sincere respect. When there is appreciation of a child's efforts and pleasure over his achievements and sympathy with his difficulties, it shows up in the interview in all sorts of ways. It shows in the little things spoken about: the youngster's interest in feeding the fish or the classroom bird, in playing with the blocks. in exploring new

52 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

books, in being group leader, in learning to use the dictionary, in planning the trip to the mayor's office, in any one of the little things a teacher from nursery school to high school has to tell about. It shows in the teacher's recounting of the way the youngster took some responsibility, or stood up for something he thought should be done, or helped out a classmate who needed a lift. It shows in the way difficulties are mentioned and in the way any offer of help is given or suggestion made. If the teacher's interest in the youngster goes beyond his achievement in the school subjects to his achievement in relationships with others, this will be evident in the interview, too, and parents will catch it.

Warm and close as the teacher's feelings may be for a child, they will probably be more objective than those of the parents. This is as it should be, for the teacher has a different kind of relationship with him. Since she is less closely identified with him personally, and is with him over a shorter period of time, there is bound to be less emotional reaction about his successes and failures, about his achievements and his abilities, and about his interest in school.

A teacher who wants to like all of the children, and who really does have great affection for them, may be surprised and even disturbed to find other feelings mixed in—feelings of exasperation sometimes; of irritation and annoyance or of resentment when they do things that are not supposed to be done. Sometimes a feeling of possessiveness creeps in which amounts almost to jealousy of the parents of some child whom the teacher believes she understands better than they do. Whatever the feelings about a given child may be, a teacher brings them to the interview.

There may be the feeling of relief that it will not be long until another teacher will take him on. The teacher may feel that the youngster does not like him or does not trust him, and may hope to find out why during the interview. There may be a fear of the child—fear of his explosions, or perhaps fear of his influence with the other children, an influence that may more than once have turned order into chaos. Now and then there are feelings of resentment toward the highly gifted child who challenges

one's every statement, or toward the very slow one who never quite gets there, or toward the day-dreamer who comes up at the end to ask about what has just been said. There may be feelings of resistance toward the one who remains scornfully aloof, or toward the one who is sweetly compliant to one's face but who is often at the bottom of trouble, or toward the one who tries to curry favor with gifts and flattery, or toward the one who always has an alibi for himself and blame for the other fellow. For the most part, however, the teacher's feelings are probably on the positive side: feelings of liking for the child, of enjoyment in the association with him, of interest in his well being, of great desire to be friends with him and to make his school days happy, useful ones.

2. How the teacher feels about the parents.

It probably would surprise parents to know how often a teacher is fearful of them, fearful that they will criticize or interfere or ask questions that might be hard to answer. Teachers often tell of feeling shy, timid, conscious of inexperience, uncertain of how to go about an interview, uncertain of what to talk about, uncertain of how parents will take what is said, or fearful that they will meet suggestions with rebuffs.

On the other hand, a teacher may feel superiority because she is familiar with the newer methods of education, which perhaps the parents don't understand, or because she has a wider knowledge of children, or because she comes from a bigger town. Maybe it boosts her morale to have the parents ask for advice and help or express their admiration for one's ability to look after thirty children when they have their hands full with one. Neither feelings of superiority nor of inferiority are any great help in getting friendly relationships established. There usually is nothing much to feel superior or inferior about anyway. The teacher excels in one thing, the parents in another, and as acquaintanceships develop it can very well lead to mutual respect and liking.

A teacher brings to any interview feelings about parents in

54 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

general; perhaps the feeling that most of them are doing a conscientious job, or perhaps quite the contrary.

Some teachers seem to look upon parents, by and large, as potential enemies who are always ready to find fault and criticize. To some they are nuisances who take more time and thought than one wants to give. Probably most look at them with genuine friendliness and are happy to know them as people, glad to visit and talk with them about the youngster, fully aware that they can be of the greatest help, eager to learn from them all that will help in understanding their youngster, ready and glad to learn from them as people with experiences different than one's own at some points, similar at others.

Often there are definite feelings about what a "good" parent is and condemnation and blame for those who fall short of that model. The teacher may have in mind specific things that must be done in order to qualify as a "good" parent, such as seeing to it that the child keeps to a regular time of going to bed, making sure that most foods are eaten or at least tried, being at home to greet the child when he comes in from school, speaking always in a pleasant voice and never, never blowing one's top, having quiet, friendly bedtime talks, giving responsibility and seeing that it is carried out, and so on.

Instead of this there may be the understanding that no two can be good parents in the same way, that there is no *one* right way to do things, and that parents in each home must work it out in their own way. It is usually a great relief to parents to find that the teacher understands that some bedtimes will be later than others; that the child cannot always have a room to himself; that parents get tired and exasperated and raise their voices higher than they mean to; that tempers snap sometimes; that occasionally there are things more important than getting homework done (such as Grandmother's unexpected visit); that one does get overanxious and give the teen-ager advice that would have been better withheld; that one does slip up now and then in giving the youngster a say-so in family affairs.

The teacher will find parents whom it is easy to like at once,

those whom it takes longer to like, and perhaps some who rub her the wrong way. It may be the manner, appearance, point of view, or just the kind of person the parent is that makes the difference. Or it may be the way the parent feels about the child or the attitude toward the teacher or the school.

Sometimes a teacher comes to an interview with judgments of the parents already formed. Perhaps they are critical judgments, based too quickly on the child's behavior or something that he has said or that someone else has told. Such judgments had better be delayed for fuller evidence and closer acquaintance.

If the teacher feels that parents are usually conscientious and that most of them try to do the best they can by their youngster, it will show in all that is said, in the encouragement that is spoken, in the ready acceptance of all sorts of ways of doing, and in the willingness to talk things over in the light of the way they *are* instead of the way one thinks they should be.

3. How the teacher feels about the homes.

A teacher may feel very strongly that this kind of home is a good one and that a poor one. Perhaps the good one is the counterpart of the teacher's own home as a child, or the one he would like to have (or maybe does have) for his own children. The poor one may be a composite picture of things he did not like in his own or has since come to think that no child should have in his experience. He may stick to these ideas right through all the interviews and may judge every home pattern that shows up by these ready-made standards, or perhaps there will come a broadening understanding that there may be good homes and poor homes of many different patterns.

A teacher will probably find an amazing variation in home pattern in any group. Often one takes these home patterns for granted, realizing vaguely that they are different but having little feeling for, or awareness of, all the myriad details that make them so—such little things as the way the top crust of an apple pie is made, the way beans are cooked, the way the table is set (if it

56 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

is set), the way food is served, the way beds are made and dishes washed, the way clothes are cared for, the way money is handled, the things that are looked upon as funny, the kind of curtains at the windows, the provision for books or music, the kinds of newspapers read if any, the way birthdays are celebrated or are not, where the pets eat if there are any, whether or not the cat can sleep on the bed and the dog on the couch, and so on and on.

Perhaps the teacher will find it so difficult to classify which is good and which is poor that she will come to the conclusion that the home can only be measured by the way of living it produces. Perhaps she will feel unable to criticize because she sees that, whatever the pattern, it is the expression of the family's whole concept of what a home is. Perhaps there will be a feeling that the basic essentials of a good home lie not in its outward form, but in the underlying feelings and relationships. Then more and more she will look through the externals, be they meager or affluent, to these relationships that explain why the child from a given home is this way or that way.

A teacher with feelings such as these will be slow to advise changing the pattern of living, knowing full well that changes cannot amount to anything unless they come out of the parents' own thought. This does not mean that a teacher will never suggest that eleven-year-old Ted might get along better in school if he could have a place to do his homework, or that four-year-old Mary would profit by some arrangement that would allow her to wash her own hands and face, or that the teen-ager really does need a place where she can fuss with her hair and fix her face without the jeering and jibing of a scornful younger brother. Of course a teacher who is interested in the youngster will talk over all such things as they come up and make suggestions as they occur. But it is one thing to talk it over and suggest the purpose to be accomplished and another to say that it should be done this way or that, or to insist that it be done at all.

As a teacher comes to an awareness of all that goes into making a home what it is, she will probably come to feel that each

family's home life is something which only that family can work out, and will be content to leave it with them.

4. How the teacher feels about herself.

Perhaps a teacher genuinely likes people and is glad to be a teacher because it means getting to know people and to touch their lives intimately. Perhaps it is the fulfillment of a long-time dream and a great satisfaction in spite of the days of going home tired and wondering why teaching was ever thought to be a good idea. Perhaps it is only something to do until something better turns up—marriage for some, a business of one's own or a better paying job for others. Maybe one drifted into it without really intending to and likes it tremendously but would not want to do it forever. Maybe it was interesting and exciting in the beginning, but now retirement seems much more to be desired and time is measured against that day. Or perhaps the thought of retirement brings regret that the days of working directly with youngsters or young people are coming to an end. Maybe she does not like teaching and feels caught, but sees no way of escape. Perhaps one speaks of being a teacher with pride, perhaps with apology. Whatever the feeling, parents will catch it sooner or later. So will the children; probably before the parents. Said one ten-year-old, summing up the situation, "She never oughta been a teacher. She's sour on kids."

All the teacher says and does with children and parents is inevitably colored by the picture she holds of what her relationship to them should be; of the function she feels the teacher should perform. Perhaps she feels that if she teaches the child the school subjects she has done her duty, and that there is no reason to follow the youngster beyond the school yard or to inquire into anything that happens outside of school hours. She may do what is prescribed more or less conscientiously, but with one eye on the clock to be sure that required hours are given and no more. Or the teacher may want a close relationship with all of the child's living; may want the school to be a vital part of that

58 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

living, beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and the gaining of skills. When a teacher feels deeply that the basic needs of children for love and trust and appreciation are as much a part of the teacher's business as book learning, those feelings will come right into any interview with parents.

Some teachers see themselves in the role of friend to both child and parents; others always maintain the role of "teacher," a little apart. Some feel that the teacher must always know the answers; others are completely at ease in searching them out together, whether it be with child or parents. With some there is the feeling, often unrecognized, that the teacher should be looked up to as the final word of authority, and that no difference of opinion should extend beyond that final word. Feelings such as these often lie behind the irritation and annoyance which one cannot quite understand. Instead there may be genuine willingness to concede a point, a real desire to know how either child or parents feel, and a willingness to listen to and consider all that is said.

The teacher may feel satisfied, on the whole, with the job she is doing, knowing that she is giving of herself wholeheartedly, seeing results in the living of the children, and getting real satisfaction from the friendship with them and from knowing that she has their trust and confidence. Or there may be feelings of not being appreciated by the children, the parents or the administrator; feelings of being pushed all the time with duties that never quite get done; feelings of not getting credit rightly due—all of these feelings that take away from the joy of teaching.

There are all the feelings, too, that the teacher has about herself as a person, whether she sees herself as a drab, solemn, uninteresting person, or as vital, full of fun, and with much of interest to give.

A teacher does well to take a good look at all of her feelings, whatever they are, to see what she feels her function as a teacher to be, how she feels about being a teacher, what kind of a teacher she feels she is, what kind she wants to be, what place she wants to take in the lives of the children, how she wants to

touch the parents and the homes, and what kind of person she feels herself to be. It will all be a part of the interview.

5. How the teacher feels about having interviews.

Some like the idea; some do not. Some have them only when and if the administrator requires or at least urges it. Others feel that they cannot possibly do as effective teaching as they want to do without knowing and talking with the parents. Often such a teacher, even though the administrator has not suggested that it be done, asks approval for going ahead with interviews. Perhaps the administrator is glad that the teacher wants to have them and gives not only permission but hearty approval, with encouragement and help. Perhaps he is not very enthusiastic about it or even disapproves, and the teacher is not sufficiently convinced of their value to pursue the matter. Or the teacher may have such a deep conviction that it is the only way to really know the youngster that she persists in pointing out how she feels it would benefit the youngster, and how it would make her teaching better and so benefit the school. An administrator is usually willing to let a teacher go ahead when convincing reasons are presented for doing so. As a matter of fact, many administrators draw a long breath of relief when they find a teacher who genuinely wants to have interviews.

Perhaps some teacher is reluctant or actually unwilling to give the time that it takes to have interviews. Maybe there is the feeling that parents are not the teacher's job, that she is employed to teach the children and nothing more. Many feel that knowing the parents is a vital part of teaching the children. Some are willing to do it when school time is set aside for it, but not if it means giving any of their own time. Some teachers do give generously and willingly of their own time, because they feel it enables them to do much better teaching. Some tell of genuine enjoyment of the visits with the parents and of lasting friendships growing out of the interviews.

60 THE TEACHER'S FEELINGS

A teacher's feelings about the importance of interviews in general will have great bearing on the feelings about the separate individual interviews themselves.

Perhaps the feeling is, "Well, here is something that must be done, so let's get it over." Or maybe, "What's the use of spending time with these parents; they're hopeless anyway"; or, "Please let this interview end before they bring up any problems"; or, "With such a gorgeous day outside, imagine having to sit here to talk to parents!" Interviews are off to a poor start when feelings such as these underlie them. Perhaps there is the feeling that the interview really is important, but it has been "one of those days" and closing the door behind her looks more attractive than talking with parents at that particular time. Or maybe enthusiasm is dimmed with the thought that monthly reports are waiting to be done, that there is telephoning to do about tomorrow's trip, or that there are absences that must be followed up. Maybe the only time available for an interview is in the evening, and, even though it seems more than she can face after a heavy day's work, she feels it important enough to try. Sometimes there is discouragement and doubt about whether or not she is really getting anywhere. There may be a real lift, with the absolute certainty that the time was well spent and that, no matter how hard it may be to do it, it is well worth the effort.

The teacher's feelings about the child, the parents, herself, interviewing in general, and this interview in particular, play a large part in setting the tone for the interview. They are important enough to spend some time finding out what they are. The teacher may find some she will want to change.

6. The administrator's feelings

THESE FEELINGS ALSO TOUCH THE TEACHER-parent interview, just as they touch everything else that goes on in the school, from the finish on the floors to what is taught and the way it is taught; the selection of equipment, building repairs and all the details of school policy. It is the administrator who has all the details on his mind, even though the school is one where everyone joins in thinking and planning together, where responsibility is shared, and where ideas may originate with one as with another. It is still the administrator who looks at it all from an overall point of view, balancing the importance of one thing against another, considering what will bring the greatest good to the children, looking thoughtfully at what the parents want from the school and considering the part they might take in it, thinking over the part the school can best play in the community, finding ways and means of interpreting the school program to the community, thinking of the teaching and the teachers who do it, and considering the ways and means of giving leadership to that and to all else that has to do with the school. His feelings are among all those that underlie teacher-

62 THE ADMINISTRATOR'S FEELINGS

parent interviews, influencing the kind they will be, the direction they will take, and the good that will come out of them; indeed whether there will be any interviews at all.

1. Feelings about the children.

The administrator has all the children to think about and plan for; the little ones and the big ones. Sometimes he will know them personally, sometimes not, but always he will have them in mind, because it is for them and because of them that all the details of administration are there to be thought about. Most of them probably do not guess how much the administrator has them in mind, how much he cares about them, and how deeply he is concerned that their school days be good days, full of the things they need to learn.

The school system may be a small one, with only one building or with a few lying near enough together that the superintendent himself can be in close touch with them all and can know the youngsters well from the kindergarten through the high school. Perhaps he has a great natural liking for children just because they are children; an appreciative enjoyment of what they do and an interest in getting close to them that brings him onto the playground or into the classroom or the gym or laboratories or shop or wherever the children are, at every opportunity. Perhaps he has a great interest in watching the children grow and progress and in talking with them to get their ideas about different things. One can readily understand how the friendship of the youngsters, as they respond to an administrator's liking for them and his interest in all that they do, makes the attention that he must give to a myriad of administrative details worth the bother.

Perhaps the school system is a larger one, having several buildings with a principal acting as the administrator in each. In this case, it is the principal who comes close to what the children are doing and learning and who has much to do with the way things go; it is his feelings about the children that determine whether

they will turn to him as a friend or keep a wary eye in his direction. Even though the superintendent is farther away from the children, his feelings about them still set the tone for what is done.

Whether it be superintendent or principal, the feelings about the children show up in all sorts of little ways that children and teachers are quick to catch. Their feelings of genuine respect for a child as a person show in the way of speaking about a child, in the way of listening to what he says, and in the kind of conversation carried on with him. Indeed, they determine whether there is any conversation with him at all. Feelings that a child as a person has a right to have opinions, a right to learn to make decisions, a right to learn the ways of living with others, and a right to do his learning at his own pace show, too, in all an administrator says and does. They show in his approval of the kind of teaching that helps children to have opinions, that gives the freedom to express them, that gives the children opportunities to make decisions, that gives the opportunity for group planning and working together, and that takes the trouble to find the youngster's bent and sets up the program so that all need not follow the same pattern of doing. They show in the provision of equipment and supplies that make all of these things possible and in the help given to teachers in doing this kind of teaching.

Whether or not the superintendent or principal feels that the children should come first in thought shows in the discussions in teacher's meetings, when all that is said comes into consideration in light of what is best for the children. It shows in his willingness to talk with the teacher about what will best help this youngster or that one. It shows in his taking the youngster's interests, abilities, and needs as the basis for deciding whether things shall be one way or another. It shows in his putting what is best for the children ahead of personal convenience, ahead of something that would make a good public show, and ahead of anything that would ever seem to exploit the children in any way.

If there are feelings of genuine personal enjoyment of the children, in addition to interest in them and the wish to do the

64 THE ADMINISTRATOR'S FEELINGS

best possible by them, they will come to light, too, plainly enough. Many teachers could tell how an administrator's enjoyment of the children's doings has lifted the day out of the humdrum, how it has given a glow to all the work being done, and how it has removed any lurking fear of his visits.

An administrator's feelings will be right there in every teacher-parent interview, even though he himself is nowhere to be seen. They will be there whether they are feelings of love and respect for the children and the wish to understand them or something different than these. They will be there whether they are feelings that the children should be the starting point for the whole school program or that the program comes first with the children fitted into it.

It is natural that the administrator's feelings should have a great bearing on the teacher's and that his feelings should be present in the parents' thought. The parents know pretty well what they are because the children know when he likes them, when he wants to see things from their point of view, and when he really cares about what happens to them and how they feel about it. The thought about the administrator's attitude toward the children that both teacher and parent take into the interview has its influence on all, though no word of it may be spoken.

2. About the parents.

Often a teacher does not give much thought to the administrator's feelings about parents, except the very obvious ones of whether he thinks it is a good idea for them to have an active part in the school or whether he feels it better that they should not, whether he likes to have them feel free to come to the building where their child is at any time or whether he feels it better for them to come only by appointment. These are feelings which, of course, have a great deal to do with whether there will be few interviews or many, whether there will be many little, informal ones as well as longer, more-planned ones, whether the teacher will be talking about things the parents

know at first-hand or about things which they know more by hearsay.

Perhaps the school is one where the administrator feels that the parents have a right to know all that goes on; that they have a greater stake in it than anyone else, not just because they pay the taxes to support it but because it is where their children spend a big proportion of their waking hours for a good many years. He may make a point of this in teacher's meetings, so that the teacher knows that he wants the parents told things that their youngster is doing. The administrator may feel not only that the parents should know what goes on but that they should be in on it, taking an active part in it and not just looking on from the outside.

Such feelings about the parents' place in things touch the matter of interviews very closely. For one thing, there will be many more interviews than would be possible when parents can come only on occasion. When they come and go—helping in cafeteria, library, office, and maybe in the classroom itself—it is such a natural thing to sit down a few minutes to talk that often one will do it without even thinking about its being an interview. Yet it may be just those few words together that will turn the trick in knowing the next move with Susie. The things talked about will probably take a different turn, too, when parents know things from the inside and feel that they have a hand in them.

The administrator who wants the parents to know what goes on in the school, or the one who goes further and wants them to have an active part in it, will probably have many helpful things to say to the teachers about his feelings toward parents in general. The teacher may not even realize how the little things the administrator says in teachers' meetings or in individual conference with the teacher or just in passing color the teacher's own feelings and the way she looks at the parents when face to face in an interview. Perhaps he speaks often of his feeling that most of them do pretty well by their children, or that, by and large, he feels they want to do a good job, or that when he realizes the problems some of them have he is amazed at what

66 THE ADMINISTRATOR'S FEELINGS

they accomplish. Now and then he may point out that the parents, too, are learning, just as children and teachers and administrator are learning; and that he feels respect and appreciation and encouragement are more in order than blame or condemnation.

Perhaps the administrator has plenty of friendliness for the parents and speaks often of his respect and liking for them, but prefers not to have them actively participating in the daily doings of the school. He may have some reservations, too, concerning what and how much they should know about the details of the running of the school. He may feel that one or another is likely to have too much to say about the doing of things that are rightly the administrator's responsibility. He may feel that it is best to avoid the danger of an overtalkative and perhaps unwise parent discussing school details without full knowledge of the whys and wherefores. Or he may feel that the teacher's time must be protected and that, with parents around, there are likely to be unthinking demands upon it that will take attention from the children. A teacher will probably know the feelings with little idea of the experiences out of which they have come; experiences perhaps with a few parents who have interfered unduly, or who have talked too much and too widely, or who did disrupting things in the classroom. Or perhaps the feelings come out of the fear that things such as these might happen, with the attendant fear of experimenting lest they should.

It might surprise an administrator, now and then, to know the sensitivity of the teachers to his feelings; to know that they reach right into every interview with the parents as they do into everything else a teacher does. They reach into the interview not only through the teacher but through the parents as well. They, too, are sensitive to what he feels about them. They are sensitive to feelings of friendliness as well as to those that are not. They know when they are welcome in the school and when they are not. They know from the whole tone of the school when the administrator feels that they should be interested in their youngster's school and wants them to be.

3. About the school.

A teacher who is alert to all that an administrator has to say concerning his feelings about the function of the school in the children's lives, its service to the community, and its role in the world today will pick up many ideas that have bearing on what is talked about in an interview. Seeing her own classroom in the school setting and the school in its wider setting helps a teacher bring to the parents the same awareness of the broadness of it all. It serves to lift all that teacher and parents talk about—the arithmetic and spelling, the difficulties of one child with another, and the progress in this or that—up to their real importance in the child's living. It serves to take the teacher's thoughts about the learning that goes on out of the narrow groove of today and to let it expand to all the breadth of its importance in daily living throughout all the years. It helps to set her sights not only on the learnings as an end in themselves, important though they are, but also on the wider needs and purposes for which they are learned.

An administrator naturally takes the lead in thinking of the school in a broad perspective because of his concern for all the aspects of its administration, because of his association in the community with people whose interests in the school touch it from many angles, because of his contacts with other administrators and their discussions of the varied communities they serve, and because of his reading and study and thinking on world affairs and the part of education in it all. This does not mean that a teacher is unmindful of such things as these or lacking in opportunity to meet and talk with others about them. It does mean that the administrator, by virtue of his position, is likely to speak often of his feelings about the particular school he administers and the function he believes it should serve and about education in general and the part he believes it may or does play in present-day affairs. It means that a teacher should give thoughtful heed to what he says.

The administrator's feelings about the school and its place fur-

nish the reason for many of the things that become matters of school policy, the reason for things being done this way instead of that. They determine largely the direction his leadership will take.

He may feel that anything that concerns the well-being of the child concerns the school and so may urge the teachers to look beyond the classroom work poorly done to the cause behind it and to see if the school can perhaps in some way be of help. Even with concern for all that relates to the well-being of the youngsters he may draw a sharp line on the responsibility he feels the school should assume. Perhaps he feels that health examinations are for the parents to look after and not the school. Perhaps he believes counselling service for parents to be necessary if some of the children are to be helped out of their difficulties, but feels it is not the school's function to provide it. Perhaps he is heartily in favor of a book-mobile but does not feel the school is the one to furnish it for the community, and so on.

He may see the school as one of many community agencies to serve the community as a whole with the obligation to work hand in hand with all the others, fitting the school health program into that of the public health agencies, responding to requests for help from the welfare agencies and turning to them for help, working with any groups providing recreational programs, planning with other educational groups in the community to further their programs, perhaps making school facilities available for forum groups, perhaps setting up classes for short-time adult education groups.

The administrator may feel that the whole school program should evolve out of as much of an understanding as one can get of life as it is being lived today, with due account taken of all the modern inventions that have changed the pace of living. He may feel that the teachers should see to it that the children have a chance to realize how the radio and airplane travel have brought the world closer together, how through them we have come closer to people of all other lands, how their ways of living and ours have become of practical concern to each other. He may lay

great stress on the school's helping the youngsters to live in their groups without barriers of prejudice because of race, religion, custom, or any other reason. He may emphasize the part the school can play in helping children to feel and show respect and consideration for individuals because they *are* individuals, to be willing to listen to other people's ideas and opinions as well as to have and express their own, to learn to think and plan together in light of what is best for all, and to take responsibility for their plans. He may point out that the school has an important role to play in the children's understanding of what democratic living is by giving them the chance to live it in their classrooms. There may be discussions with teacher groups of what the practical details of democratic classroom living are, so that it may be the actual living and not merely talk about it.

Whatever the administrator's feelings about the school and its function are, they will be there to influence teacher-parent interviews. If they be feelings such as those already mentioned they will be there as the classroom activities are discussed with the parents. If the administrator feels that the school's job is to teach the school subjects and those alone, then those feelings will be there, too.

4. About teacher-parent interviews.

Perhaps the administrator feels that having teachers and parents talk together is the key to his whole program of public relations, one of the most important means at hand for keeping parents a part of all that goes on, of interpreting the school program to them, and of getting at their feelings about it all. Or perhaps he feels a little fearful that, instead of helping public relations, things may be said or done that will rub the parents the wrong way and so hinder instead of help. He may have had some unfortunate experiences with a few such interviews that cause him to shy away from them all. Or he may have had little or no experience with any kind of interviews and is as wary as teachers often are about beginning.

70 THE ADMINISTRATOR'S FEELINGS

It may be that when the administrator hears the word "interview" he thinks of the kind usually referred to as "counselling interviews" and feels that only someone with specialized training for interviewing should undertake it. Or he may feel that any teacher has something of value to say to the parents of the children in his group and that great good can be gained by their getting together. Perhaps the administrator was a classroom teacher himself and can remember what a help it was to keep close touch with the parents, so he wants his teachers to know the same help. Or maybe he never did have interviews and feels he saved himself a lot of trouble thereby and that his teachers will, too.

Much of the way an administrator feels about teacher-parent interviews is tied up with his feelings about the parents and about the function of the school, and, for that matter, with his feelings about the children and the teacher. The more he wants the teachers to know about the children, and the more he feels the parents should be a part of the school, and the more he feels that all that concerns the children concerns the school, the more likely he is to look favorably upon teacher-parent interviews. The more experience he has had with teachers who used good judgment and common sense, and who really felt friendly toward parents and got along well with them, the more likely he is to feel that interviews are a good idea. The administrator might feel less apprehension about interviews when he is sure the teacher understands the problems involved in school administration and when the teacher is thoughtful about following school policies and careful not to make commitments that cannot be carried out. One can easily understand why an administrator who knows that his teachers are loyal and professional feels safer to have them go ahead with interviews than one who is not sure how they feel or what they may say.

Perhaps the administrator is convinced of the importance of interviews, but is moving ahead on it slowly because his teachers are fearful or inexperienced or unwilling and he feels it is best to wait until they are more ready. Often some help in the basic

knowledge of how to interview is all that is needed—some good practical suggestions on what to talk about and a few hints on how to begin. After a day's workshop things often look very different to the teachers. He may feel that nothing is to be gained by forcing the matter, so he discusses it in meetings from time to time, letting it be known that he would like to see interviews get under way and telling his reasons but not pushing anyone into it. He may make opportunities to talk with teachers individually about it, to encourage those who seem more ready than others to go ahead and to help them see how they could get started. He may feel that it is so important that it must be done, even though teachers are reluctant or even unwilling to make a start. He may feel that once started the realization of how helpful the interviews can be will bring the willingness to try, and that in his school he wants only those teachers who are ready at least to give it a try.

Often an administrator is so busy with other things that he has not got around to interviews, but he would be glad enough to hear about whatever plan the teacher who wants to have them has in mind, particularly if things are well thought-out and she has some definite ideas about why she wants to do it. One teacher may present it from the "ounce of prevention" point of view, with emphasis on the difficulties and misunderstandings better knowledge of the youngsters may forestall. Another may speak of it as just as much part of teaching preparation as the reading of professional books and magazines. Another may stress the better teaching that can be done when there is a sound basis for understanding the children. Still another may point out the time that is saved in working from the basis of acquaintance with the child's parents; that they can furnish help in the beginning which will avoid a long-time groping in the dark.

It is easy to understand that, when reasons for interviewing are well thought-out and put into words, it can add greatly to an administrator's feeling of confidence in letting a teacher go ahead with them. If the reasons are presented with the plan for getting started, he will probably feel even more confident that

72 THE ADMINISTRATOR'S FEELINGS

good will come from it. Perhaps it is the teacher's idea to begin in a small way; not launching into scheduled interviews with parents of each child but with only a few at first, to see how things go. Or maybe the teacher will point out that a number of the parents have already dropped by informally to talk about one thing or another. With this as a start, perhaps some of the others could be asked to do so, beginning it all in an informal way.

Often a teacher finds that the administrator holds back about urging interviews because he feels that he cannot give school time for it and he hesitates to ask the teachers to use their own time. It must be a great satisfaction to such an administrator to find a teacher who is willing to do it even on her own time, because she believes that it is a help in teaching, or because she sees it as part of the teacher's job, or because she really wants to be friends with the parents. Perhaps the administrator feels so strongly that teacher-parent interviews are a help to good teaching that he has been able to arrange with his Board of Education, Board of Directors, Executive Committee, or whatever the final authority is to give some school time for it. Perhaps he can allow an afternoon a month at first, perhaps more. Arrangements may be made to relieve the teacher of a great amount of clerical work, so that time can be used for interviews. Or the administrator may give his consent even though he is still unconvinced of the value of the teacher having interviews, waiting to see whether any good will come of it.

Whatever the administrator's feelings about the teacher's having interviews may be, they are a part of the picture. So are his feelings about all else that touches the school, his feelings about himself and his place in the community, his feelings about the community itself as a place to live and to work, and his feelings about the people in the community. All of these are there underlying the interview, together with the feelings of all the others concerned.

Much has been said here about starting off on any teacher-parent interviewing with thought given to the feelings of all of

the people concerned. Great emphasis has been given to this because it is very, very important. It is important not only to consider feelings in the beginning but to take them into account all the way through. We have implied throughout the discussion and we want to state it clearly here that we think it is important too, for a teacher to be as accepting as possible of the feelings of each of the people involved in the interview—the child, the parents, the teacher herself, and the administrator. We know that often it is easier to *tell* someone to be accepting than it is to *be* so, but it is something in which one can grow. It is a safe and sure way to *go* about interviewing. Then the way is open to discuss whatever there is to talk about.

PART THREE

What to talk about

The matters that relate to a child's well-being are the things that teachers and parents will want to talk about. This covers a wide territory, which is probably why the teacher sometimes feels at a loss to know where to begin or to know what specific items, out of all the possibilities, to select for any one interview.

It is best to make no big problem of it but just to talk about whatever teacher or parents want to. They may want to talk about something the child has done or is going to do at home or at school. Teacher and parents may want to plan together about it. Frequently it is a question that starts off the interview: Why is this? Why is that? What do you think of this and so? It may be the teacher who will ask the question or it may be the parents. As conversation continues it will be natural for the teacher to tell about the child's school living and for the parents to tell about his home living. Often the teacher can give suggestions that will be helpful to the parents. In doing so, though, it is best to be watchful not to fall into the way of telling them what they should do or how they should do it; they are the ones to decide that. However, the everyday helpful things that a teacher learns from studying about children and working with them can be passed along merely as suggestions for the parents to take or leave as they wish.

No one can say, of course, what any given teacher and the parents of the children in her group will want to talk about. That is something that will work out as time goes on and different events

7. Situations often occasioning interviews

WHATEVER THE SITUATION MAY BE WHICH serves as a starting point for an interview, many other matters will come up in the discussion, some of which will have greater importance than the original situation. A happening mentioned only incidentally may give the teacher new understanding of the youngster's behavior or deeper insight into how the school can be of help. A casual comment about the child's bringing-up may bring sudden awareness of the great effort the parent is making to do a good job, which may add greater respect and liking.

A teacher will often wonder what to do about these things that come up incidentally; whether to comment on them briefly and go on with the discussion of the original incident, whether to drop the first matter and go on with these, or whether to make no comment on these matters either now or later. Sometimes the things mentioned in passing, although enlightening, are really none of the teacher's business and had better be passed by. Sometimes asking for more information on the point mentioned may seem entirely appropriate. If a helpful suggestion comes to mind it probably should be given. The teacher can

usually tell whether it would be welcomed. It may help to run silently and quickly through a few questions, such as: "Is it any of my business?" If not, then drop it. "Is it going to be helpful in knowing what to do about the matter under discussion?" If not, perhaps it is best to wait and think it over. "Will it probably embarrass the parent to give it emphasis now?" If so, better not do it. "Does the parent seem to want to talk about it?" It may be that it was brought up for that very reason. "Would it seem to be prying if I ask more about it?" If it is, don't do it. It may be the cue to the situation being discussed and is just the thing to be given attention.

Usually it seems a good idea to stick fairly well to the matter that occasioned the interview. If the parents asked for the interview, it will probably give them a satisfying feeling for the teacher to stay with what they wanted to talk about. If the teacher asked for the interview for some particular reason, the parents are usually glad to have that discussed without much wandering far afield.

In commenting on possible interviews based on the following situations, the suggestions are sketchy rather than complete, since they are intended to serve only as the starting point for the teacher's thinking.

A. Initiated by the Teacher

1. Child is absent a great deal and teacher feels that schoolwork is suffering.

Although some schools have a special person to follow up absences, many teachers have this to do themselves. It is a good opportunity for a teacher to let the parents know that there is genuine concern about the youngster. Before the interview there may have been a telephone call to ask if the child is ill and, having discovered that this is the reason for the absence, the teacher may want to talk with the parents about the work being missed and to work out with them what part of it the child might be

doing at home. If he is not well enough to do any work and is worrying about that, the interview may serve to assure the parents that the teacher will be glad to help with it when he gets back, or to help them find a tutor if that seems best. Or there may have been notes from the parents from time to time explaining the child's absence on the basis of home emergency, trips away, or relatives visiting, and the teacher may feel that it is important for the child's schoolwork that the number of such emergencies be reduced.

At any rate, the time has come when it seems best to talk the matter over and the parents have been asked to come for an interview. Perhaps both will come, perhaps only one. They may begin with a variety of excuses for the absence at once, before the teacher can say much. Parents often feel that the teacher is blaming them and holding them to account, and so they are immediately on the defensive. They may feel a little guilty because they really could get the youngster there more regularly. There may be reasons for the absence that they do not want to speak of; that there is not enough warm clothing for cold days, or that a maid who is left to see that the child goes doesn't do it, or that the parents want to go places and are not too concerned about school. If the interview is to be helpful, teacher and parents need to get on a footing where no one is blaming or feeling blamed, but where everyone is considering what it means to the youngster to be out of school so much. The teacher may explain how much work is being missed and show how hard it will be for the child to make it up. There may be mention of school affairs that he cannot take part in because of absences. She may explain that he cannot really be one of the group because he is out so much that he does not know what has been done.

The child may have just started to school, and the parents may not have realized how important it is for him to take school seriously. The mother may go out for housework to certain places where she cannot take the baby, so the older one must stay out of school on those days to baby-sit. Or it may be that family finances are such that the high school student must work

80 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

part-time to help keep things going, and some jobs he gets may come during school hours.

Whatever the reason for the child's absence, through talking things over with the teacher parents may be able to work out some feasible plan so that schoolwork can go on regularly. When possible, it is best to put the emphasis on what it means in the child's living to be missing so much schoolwork, rather than on the probability of lowered grades and the possibility that the child will not be promoted. When this latter is the parents' major concern it may have to be the point of approach, but the other emphasis can still be given.

2. Child is finding his schoolwork so easy that teacher feels there must be more challenge.

It is a wise teacher who will speak of such a matter as this without comparing the child with the other children to their detriment, and a child is fortunate when teacher and parents understand that, in their planning together to make school challenging and interesting, it is best to include how to do it without making him feel superior or different.

The parents may have been asked to come to consider the alternate possibilities of the child's skipping a grade or having an enriched program where he is. The teacher may point out the advantage of the skipping, such as giving the challenge of an older group and offering advanced academic work, which might hold greater interest. The advantages of the enriched program may lie in keeping the child with classmates he knows and giving him an opportunity to broaden his interests, rather than plunging into meeting greater academic requirements. There might be the possibility in a departmentalized program of staying with his own group and taking an additional class along some special line of interest. There may be consideration of challenging activities outside of school, such as accordion lessons, or the joining of a hiking group, or taking on some remunerative work if it is an older child.

Obviously, if the school policy permits, the individual characteristics and wishes of the child, the parents' feeling about the relative advantages and disadvantages of what might be done, and the teacher's feelings about what seems best are deciding factors and offer plenty to talk about in an interview.

3. Child shows some special talent which teacher feels should be given attention.

Perhaps the child shows special aptitude in art, writing, dramatics, music, shop work, science, or in getting along with people. In talking with the parents, the teacher may find that they are well aware of it. However, they may be so accustomed to it that they take it more or less for granted. They may be very interested in seeing some of the work the child has done at school along this line and in hearing why the teacher considers it especially good. They may welcome suggestions on how the talent might be developed.

If the talent is in art or music, the ways of developing it may be more familiar than in other fields. Even so there may be a special teacher who can be asked for suggestions, or the child's room teacher may be the one to suggest possibilities of lessons on one instrument or another or to mention art classes that are available in the community. Some parents think that talent in music calls for piano or voice lessons, and the teacher may want to suggest other possibilities, such as flute, accordion, auto harp, and the like. It may be that the child's talent lies in appreciation in one or more fields, rather than in performance, and the teacher may suggest experiences to satisfy and foster the interest.

If the talent is in writing, the teacher may tell of opportunities offered at school and suggest what an important part home encouragement plays in keeping the child's interest alive and in giving impetus to effort. Aptitude in science frequently is recognized without much being done about it. A teacher can often suggest useful apparatus or hobby kits in addition to those the parents have provided. There are atomic energy kits, geological

82 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

kits, botanical and zoological outfits, and the like, which it is a good idea for teachers to know about. With an older child, work experience in a commercial plant might be challenging and interesting, besides offering opportunity to look into career possibilities. When the special aptitude is in getting along with people, the teacher should highlight its importance. Frequently such a talent is passed over lightly, with the comment that the youngster is socially inclined, when it is really something useful enough to merit cultivation.

Once the subject is brought up in an interview, parents probably can relate incidents from the child's babyhood on when the characteristic was evident, and the teacher can add school incidents. Together teacher and parents can think of ways to nurture the talent both at school and at home. The parents might be glad to know about references for reading which the teacher could give on whatever the subject is.

4. Teacher needs information about child who has moved from another community.

Changing school is always something of an adjustment for a child, and things can be made much easier for him if teacher and parents get together immediately. The parents will probably have heard in the school office about general school requirements: length of day, arrangements for lunch, books used, materials needed, and so on. Usually they will appreciate hearing from the teacher about the day's program and about the specialists, if there are any, who come to the room or to whom the children go for music, art, and shop. They may be interested in seeing whatever special rooms there are for these activities and in visiting the cafeteria, the gym, the library, and the playground. If it is a nursery school, kindergarten, or one of the early grades, the play-house corner, the library corner, the place where wraps are kept, and the toilet rooms will all be of interest.

The teacher may want to know how large a school it was that the child has come from, how many there were in the room he

was in, whether he stayed at school for lunch, how long a day's session he has been accustomed to, and what school activities he liked best. If it is a young child, there may be inquiry about his resting and eating and toilet habits. Such information as this will probably be interspersed with parents' comments, which will give an idea about how he got along in the other school, whether it was a rigid or informal school, and what the parents liked or disliked about it. How he got on with other children may be mentioned, or that may be left for the new teacher to discover. If the child is farther along in the grades, there will probably be mention of his progress in the school subjects and the teacher may want to ask about the ones he liked best.

Such an interview can result in a friendliness and understanding that will add greatly to the happiness of a child's first days in a new school.

5. Teacher feels child needs some help in school subjects.

The child may have had to be out of school for some time and may have missed group experiences and explanations of work, which would make it hard for him to take part in what is going on. Knowing how much it means to a child to be one of the group, the teacher may feel that it is wise for him to have some outside help for a time. When the teacher helps parents to understand that this is why help is being recommended, they will probably accept the need for it without feeling embarrassed about it themselves or making the child feel so.

The child may be a slow learner who, if given some special help, can keep along with the other children well enough to be happy in the group. Or there may be some one particular thing that is difficult. In any case the teacher will probably want to speak about the difficulty and to tell what is being done at school and what additional help she believes is needed. A teacher who is sensitive to parents' feelings can do this in such a way that they will feel perfectly comfortable about it. It is not that the child is being compared unfavorably with other children. A teacher

84 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

should be watchful not to compare children either to their detriment or to their advantage. It is not that he cannot keep up to a prescribed standard. One would hope that there would be no rigid standard. It is rather that with this help the child can get more benefit and enjoyment out of his school experiences because of being able to participate with the group.

If the difficulty is in reading, the teacher may feel that it would help if the parents made a point to read with the youngster at home. Suggestions may be offered of books to be read. If it is in arithmetic that the youngster has trouble, perhaps teacher and parents together can think of opportunities for giving the needed practice, such as a toy cash register for store play, an opportunity to do shopping errands, or an allowance to manage. The teacher may bring up the idea of some tutoring or of having the child stay a few minutes on certain days for help at school. The matter of talking about it with the child may come up, with discussion of the desirability of doing it in a way that will lead to his accepting it happily without feeling that he has fallen short or that he is being blamed by either teacher or parents. If the help needed goes beyond that which has been discussed here and is definitely in the field of remedial work, then probably the principal, the supervisor, the specialist, and the teacher will decide who among them shall talk with the parents.

If the difficulty lies with some particular subject, the question may come up about whether or not it really must be taken or whether something else might be substituted, particularly if the child has reached departmentalized grades. This is a point where teacher and principal together will probably talk with the parents. It is possible that shifting to another series of courses will be the answer. Aptitude tests may be suggested as an aid to helping child and parents decide where he can best put his efforts.

6. Teacher just wants to get acquainted with the parents.

Teachers often say that it is harder to know what to talk about in this sort of interview than in any other, because there seems to be no special starting point.

If school is just opening and the teacher does not know the parents and is only now getting acquainted with the child, a good starting point is how the child feels about having school begin and what he did during summer vacation. The parents will have plenty to tell and will probably add comments on what they feel the summer meant to the child, in discovering new interests, learning new skills, or finding of new companions. If time was spent with grandparents or at camp, there may be comments on the child's relationships with the grandparents or other relatives or on the relationships with camp counsellor and other campers. If it is an older child, mention may be made of work experiences, of trips taken independent of the family, or of some business enterprise undertaken. As the recountal goes on, it will be natural for the teacher to speak of ways in which the summer experiences will tie in with schoolwork.

If school has been going on for a while, a good place to begin is with something in which the child is particularly interested at school or something in which he is doing especially well. There may be some piece of work to show—a drawing, a painting, some clay work, some writing, a workbook well done. The teacher may have written down a story or poem which the child made up and which the parents otherwise would never hear. Attention may be called to some block building the little child has done or helped with, and this will lead to telling of other things the youngster likes to do with the group or with a few children—playing in the doll corner, dressing up, caring for pets, playing in the sandbox, putting puzzles together, reading in groups for fun if reading days have come, playing store, looking at pictures, and the like.

If it is an older child and it is the shop teacher who is talking with the parents, there may be shop projects under way to show. The parents may have been looking for just this opportunity to get acquainted with the shop teacher because the youngster has spoken of him so often. They may want to talk about the engineering course in college that the youngster has in mind. The homemaking teacher may speak of the sewing that is under way or being planned, of the canning and freezing being done, or of

86 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

the house furnishings being renovated; or there may be a unit under way on baby-sitting that the parents have been wanting to know more about. There is always plenty to talk about when one gets right down to the youngster and his interests.

The teacher should be ready to listen as well as to talk. Very soon then teacher and parents will probably begin to see each other as people, and, as conversation goes on, to find common interests and perhaps mutual acquaintances. Many lasting friendships start with just such interviews. In any case it is a good basis for making the child's school year profitable and happy.

7. The teacher has asked the parents to come for an interview as the first step in the school's new reporting system.

Before this happens, parents are likely to have been notified by the administrator that the report-card system has been changed, and that reporting will be done by individual interview. There probably will have been explanations of reasons for the change. There may have been a PTA meeting where the matter was discussed. Teachers will probably have had instructions on what should be covered in such interviews. This may have been the subject of a number of staff-meeting discussions. It may be that certain days have been set aside for these reporting interviews, with a specific amount of time, maybe a half hour, allotted for each. This means that a teacher needs to be well prepared so that the report will really be complete.

One purpose of reporting by interview is to give opportunity for talking together about the child's progress. This calls for listening as well as talking. There are always many things that parents can tell about the child's schoolwork as it is seen from the home angle. Often it comes as a surprise to parents to find that they have something to bring to this sort of interview. They usually come expecting the teacher to do the talking. Some will expect to hear the report entirely in terms of letter or figure grades. They may want to know what the teacher's comments mean in terms of where their child stands in the group. It is a

good idea for the teacher to be ready to tell in a few words why it seems best to think of a child's progress in light of his own previous record, rather than in competition with classmates. A teacher needs to understand that it is often difficult for parents to make the shift from the idea of competitive grading to that of individual progress. Many teachers find it difficult themselves.

Sometimes the system of reporting by interview will still be a reporting of letter or figure grades on a competitive basis, the interview being just one short step away from the sent-home-to-be-signed report card. One may as well recognize that by the time a child gets well on into the grades competition is bound to be present in some degree, and the children (and so the parents) are well aware of the relative accomplishments within the group. A teacher can help parents to look on this as an incentive to individual effort, rather than as competition for class rank.

Even though letter and figure grades may be given, the reporting by interview gives opportunity for emphasizing the importance of things other than standing in academic subjects; for example, skills in handicrafts, leadership ability, talent in music or art, athletic skills, and so on. It gives opportunity to mention this child's particular abilities, but without ignoring or neglecting the points on which he needs help. The parents of high school boys and girls who are thinking of college will probably be interested in going into the implications of the academic ratings, because these will affect college entrance. Whether the child be in kindergarten or high school or any one of the grades between, the parents will usually welcome the reporting by interview as telling them much more than ever could be told by the older report-card method.

Probably teacher and parents will talk about the importance of not making the child feel that he is a failure and about the value of helping him to recognize the things which he really does nicely as well as those where improvement is needed. The things a child does well often do not show up in grades, and many parents need help in seeing that these, too, are of importance and that children vary widely in the things in which they show

88 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

ability. It is a real service both to child and parents when a teacher can help parents to accept the child as he is, to be content with the abilities he has; and to encourage him to do all he can without pushing him to achievements for which he is not ready.

8. Teacher wants the parent to give help in the school.

Perhaps some mother plays the flute or violin or accordion and the teacher wants to arrange for her to play for the children. Or the children may be going on an excursion and the teacher wants a mother to help. Or there may be a father skilled in electronics whom the teacher hopes will come in to talk with a group of older children. Or some father may own a printing plant and the English teacher wants the class to see how printing is done. Or one father may be a rancher and the teacher wants to arrange for a day at the ranch. Or maybe there are toys that need repair. Or perhaps some parent has a hobby collection the children would like to see. Or maybe there is one who is skilled in storytelling.

As a teacher becomes acquainted with parents, all sorts of things will come to light that different ones can do to bring richness and enjoyment to the children. It is natural to ask if they will do it, and then to plan together about when and how, with the teacher explaining what the children have been doing and of how this particular thing fits in. There may be mention of the children as a group, their interests, the different experiences they have had as a group, and perhaps some of the individual responses to be expected—the eager questioning of this one; the quiet absorption of that one; the excited comments of another. If it is a trip with which the parent is to help, the teacher should give information about rules that the children are expected to follow. Perhaps she will point out a child who is always ready to help look after the others, or ones who need some special attention. If the parent is coming to speak to an older group it will be helpful to know what phases of the subject have been covered in assignments, some of the questions the group would like touched

upon, and so on. Some teachers will want to have a representative of the student group participating in the interview when plans for the visit are being made.

Some schools do not yet go very far in turning to parents for help. Others do use such help extensively throughout the school—in the lunchroom, in the shop, in the gardens, in the office, on the school bus, in the classrooms. This means many interviews for the teacher and the parents giving the help, and a very good chance for really getting acquainted.

9. Crowded school conditions make it necessary for the group to go on a half-day session, and teacher wants to plan with the parents so that this will not be a hardship.

There may be the question of which session it is best for the child to attend. Family living patterns are a factor here. Maybe the father gets home from work late at night and the family sleeps late, making the afternoon more convenient for school. Perhaps the mother works outside the home in the morning and wants the child in school while she is gone. Maybe the child is one of those who are slow to get underway in the morning, and would therefore do better coming in the afternoon. Or coming in the morning might give an opportunity for the afternoon nap that a young child needs. If the boy or girl is in high school, there may be after-school jobs to be taken into account, especially if the afternoon session runs late. Or the child might have a morning paper route, and getting to school for a session beginning earlier than usual might be difficult. When children are brought to school as Daddy goes to work, that has to be given thought; and if several children in the family come on the school bus, it will probably have to be arranged so that all can come to the same session.

Perhaps the teacher will want to explain that there will be less time to take the children on trips now and, since these are recognized as valuable background for discussions and reading and story writing, it would be helpful if there could be some extra family trips that would give the youngster rich experiences to

90 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

talk and write about. She might suggest additional home experiences for younger children, with paints and crayons and clay, or making things for the dolls, or some woodwork if possible, because of curtailed school time for these things. With older children study may have to be done at home that otherwise would have been provided for in school time. Teacher and parents may want to talk about arranging a regular time for it, so that habits of systematic work will be kept up. Parents will probably be interested in hearing about the revised schedule for the school day made necessary by the double sessions.

10. The child has been very disturbing in the schoolroom and the teacher wants to talk with the parents about it.

It may be that the youngster is quarrelsome with the other children, or that he is destructive of things belonging to the other children and to the school, or that he disrupts whatever the group tries to do by objecting vociferously to every suggestion, by arguing every point, or by refusing to do anything asked of him. Or he may always be wisecracking or he may be keeping up a running fire of undertone comment as others talk. The teacher may have asked the parents to come in the hope of arriving at a better understanding of the reasons for the youngster's behavior.

The interview might start off with a question about the child's feelings toward school or how the parents feel he is getting along. As conversation goes on, the teacher may mention that the child often does not seem to want to do the things that the other children have decided to do or that he does not seem very happy with the group. The parents may comment on his behavior at home, on things he says about the group, or on other school experiences. They may be surprised to hear that there has been any difficulty, they may offer excuses for the behavior, or they may tell of their own concern over the thing the teacher has mentioned.

Instead of starting with a question, as suggested above, the teacher may want to come directly to the point; to tell of the

behavior that is disturbing in the group and ask if the parents can give any idea of the reasons for it or any suggestions as to the best thing to do about it. It may seem wise to make it clear that they are not being asked to punish the child or to suggest how the teacher shall punish him, but only to help in getting at the root of the difficulty.

Mention may be made that behavior such as this suggests unhappy feelings inside. The parents may or may not speak of possible causes for unhappiness, and the teacher probably will feel it best not to probe for causes that the parents do not mention voluntarily. They may have more to say at another time, after they have thought about it all, or they may not want to talk about it either then or later. It may be a relief to them to have the whole thing come out for open discussion. They may have realized that all was not as it should be but have pushed it back in thought, hoping that it would blow over. Now, with it in the open, they can look at it squarely and, with the teacher, try to find what to do about it. The teacher, by word and tone and manner, can make it clear that the whole purpose of the interview is to know better how to help the youngster, not to blame or condemn either the child or the parents. If there is a guidance counsellor or clinical psychologist, the teacher could suggest that help might be had from that source and, if the parents are willing, could arrange the appointments.

B. Initiated by the Parents

1. Parents are dissatisfied with the way reading is taught.

Perhaps the child is in the first grade and does not bring a book home, and, from all that the parents can learn by questioning him, there is no time when the children gather together for a reading recitation. A teacher should try to understand that it is the parents' great interest in the child's progress in school that makes them question. The teacher can rejoice that learning to read seems so important, for it really is. It is entirely natural for par-

92 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

ents to expect their child to be taught reading as they were taught. The teacher knows a way that is thought to be better. The parents' questioning gives the chance to explain how it is being done here and why.

Mention may be made of the reading being done outside of books, the charts that the children have helped to make telling of a trip they have gone on together, the list of room responsibilities written on the blackboard with the names of the children volunteering to do them, the labels indicating contents of boxes, the signs around the room. The children may not have thought of these as reading and so have not told about them at home. There may be word games, too, that they may not have mentioned because they never thought of them as reading.

Parents will probably be interested in seeing the library corner and in hearing how, as the children look at the picture books and the easy reading books there, they comment on the caption under a picture or ask about some word. Perhaps the teacher will speak of feeling that it is important for reading to seem enjoyable to the children and will tell how the idea is being built up that one reads to find out what is said. Something may be said about wanting the children to take in a whole group of words at a glance, rather than slowing down to look laboriously at each word. The parents may need some reassurance that word recognition is not going to be neglected, because it is quite right that they should want their child to be an accurate and not a sloppy reader. The teacher may explain that word recognition begins to come as the children notice the distinguishing features of words, and may tell how they are helped to be independent in figuring out what a new word is and in remembering the hard words. There may be a list of these which teacher and children have gathered together on the board or on a chart as an aid to remembering them.

Parents are sure to be interested in seeing the basic readers and the supplementary books that the children use and to hear how they read these different supplementary books independently and then tell one another about what they have read. Whatever the

way of doing in a given school may be, that is the thing to tell the parents, with the whys and wherefores for doing it so. It seems right that they should know how their child is being taught and why it is thought to be a good way.

In mentioning to parents how their child is progressing with his reading, a teacher needs to be watchful to do it without making comparisons with the other children, either favorably or otherwise. There is always plenty to talk about with the parents' own child as the subject—the books he likes, the interest he shows in words, the comments he makes about what he has read, his interest in the meaning of words, some of the suggestions he has offered in the making of this chart or that.

2. Parents feel that the school is too free, that the children do too much as they please.

This is a common complaint. There are many parents who want school to be an authoritative place where the children are made to do what the teacher says they shall, and if there is much opportunity for them to take the initiative, these parents feel that it is too free. Others, although they want the children to use their initiative, feel that it is going too far when they are allowed to call the teacher uncomplimentary names, or when they can kick and bite without reproof, or when they can say that they won't do what is asked and nothing is done about it. Some find it hard to feel that it is really school when they see the children moving about freely and talking with each other without asking permission, or deciding on some project and going ahead to carry it on independently.

The teacher often may help parents to see that the freedom is to good purpose by relating specific incidents showing how their child thought through some problem and came forth with a good solution, or how he saw something that needed to be done and went ahead and did it. There may be mention of wanting the children to learn self-control rather than blind obedience to the teacher's word of command. Something may be said about

94 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

the possible effects of rigid authoritative control, which appear in children's overdependence, in their fearfulness in meeting new situations, in their inability to decide what to do when confronted with difficulties, or in their general uneasiness and anxiety. The teacher may speak about the difference between dictatorial control and the teacher guidance that helps toward the learning of self-control. She may assure the parents that authority is used when the children's self-control is not yet equal to the situation. It is usually comforting to parents to know that the children are not left to run wild, but that the teacher steps in before things get out of hand.

The teacher of older children may explain that more and more they are left to act on their own initiative; that they are deliberately given more freedom with less and less supervision as a means of helping them to become independently responsible.

Teachers will probably vary greatly in what they will say about the importance of a child's being free to express feelings of anger, hate, and hostility. Some may want a child to express such feelings without fear of punishment; to meet instead, the assurance that the teacher understands fully how he feels because of having often felt the same way. Whether parents agree with this idea or not they will usually appreciate knowing what the teacher thinks and her reasons for thinking so. It may help them in meeting similar situations at home. When they do not agree, it makes for good feeling for the teacher to be willing to listen to their ideas and to be ready to talk them over.

3. Parents come to complain that other children pick on their child and to demand that something be done.

Brushing the parents off is no help. A teacher who can listen quietly and open-mindedly to the account of the child's difficulties will probably learn many things that there would be no other way of knowing, about how this child does and feels and about the other children, too. As the recital goes on the teacher

needs to be watchful not to be led into either verbally or mentally condemning this child or the others. The main thing is to see how to be of help to all concerned. If one can be genuinely glad that the parents came and genuinely willing to listen, it is a big help, for a parent quickly feels the teacher's interest and the desire to be helpful. The teacher may want to ask how the child has made out in other school situations, about the children in the home neighborhood and the friends he has among them, about how he gets on with children who come to his home to play.

The parents may be really in search of help and glad to listen to the teacher's suggestions, or their present mood may make it wise to leave any suggestions for a later visit. During the conversation they may reveal their great desire that the child be accepted and their fear that he will not be. A teacher who is alert can sense very quickly the feeling of the parents and, as the conversation goes on, can make mental note of anything which gives a clue to the reasons for the situation.

Sometimes the glimpse of some deep-seated reason for the trouble will indicate that this is a matter for the clinical psychologist or the guidance counsellor, if there is one. Often, however, the teacher will be the only one available to attempt to handle the situation. It will frequently seem wise to listen attentively at the first interview but to make few comments, waiting until there has been time to think over what has been said and to decide what seems possible and best to do to help the youngster and to satisfy the parents. It is important that both things be accomplished. It is important, too, for the parents to leave with the feeling of having been listened to respectfully; of having been treated with courtesy; of having had their problem recognized; and with the feeling of assurance that the teacher will follow through and do something.

This is the kind of interview about which it is often a temptation to gossip, but a wise teacher will keep it all confidential, talking it over only with someone who can be of help in knowing what is best to do. This may very well be the administrator,

96 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

who may have facts about the situation that would be helpful and who, whether he has the facts or not, would doubtless be ready to give it his consideration.

4. Child has not been getting as good grades as the parent wants.

The parents may come with the idea that the teacher does not bear down heavily enough in making the child keep at his work, or that he is not given enough help, or that the teacher is not being fair in grading, or that the child is not putting forth the effort they would like to see, and they want to know why.

The teacher, too, may have the idea that the child is doing much less than he could and may be glad to explore the possible reasons with the parents. Together they may consider the idea that perhaps he does not have enough challenge and so is bored, or that the work is too hard and he is discouraged, or that he has his mind on other things that seem more important to him.

The teacher may feel that the parents are putting too much emphasis on high grades at the expense of other things that are important in the child's living. It may be helpful to speak of some of the so-called extracurricular activities that give a child a chance to explore many interests and perhaps to discover new talents, or that offer opportunity to develop initiative in planning with the group and responsibility in carrying out the plans. The teacher may find that the parents have an eye on college for the boy or girl and they know that the English grades so far produced are dimming the hope of acceptance by the college of their choice. There may be opportunity for the teacher to raise the question of how the youngster feels about the matter and to suggest that all of them talk together about it.

When the parents explain why they feel that the teacher should be firmer about holding their child to his work it may be agreed that they have a point. The reason may lie in individual characteristics which the teacher had not recognized or in some previous experience about which the teacher had not known.

In the matter of the grading not being fair, a teacher needs to

be watchful not to become immediately defensive. Parents may tell of the great effort a child has made and of hours of time spent which were not fully evidenced in the work handed in, hours which nevertheless netted valuable results in learning. It is always helpful for a teacher to hear about these things that a child himself is not likely to tell. The teacher may want to explain how the grade is arrived at, speaking of all the things that are taken into account in deciding on it. These are things that parents have no way of knowing, unless, as does happen in some schools, the children are aware of how their grades are determined, or even have a part in the evaluation of their work. The teacher may explain that effort is taken into account as well as the result produced. Perhaps the child's attitude is also considered, whether it be willing and cooperative, or resistant and antagonistic.

The parents may mention things that they have been doing to try to bring forth better grades. They may have been giving help with homework, or offering a reward for every A produced, or reducing his allowance when grades have fallen below a certain point. The teacher may point out that pressure at home often only makes a child tense and anxious and increases rather than lessens the difficulty. Together teacher and parents may want to discuss the type and amount of homework help that would be useful.

5. Parents object to the amount of homework the child has to do.

Some may feel there is too much homework, others that there is too little. In the first instance, perhaps they feel that the child is too young to have any homework at all; that he needs his time out of school for active play; that it is the teacher's business to give any help needed during school hours. As the teacher gets their point of view she may agree that it would be better to reduce the amount. The teacher may bring out the point that homework is looked upon as a useful way to tie school and home closely together; to let the parents know the kind of work the

98 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

youngster has to do and to give them a part in the doing. Not that they are expected actually to do any part of it, but the fact that they know what it is and how it changes from week to week gives them a part in it.

With children along in the grades or in high school, the parents often say that, with music lessons, scout activities, meetings of church groups and school social groups, and some money-earning projects, the youngster stays up to all hours of the night to get homework done. The teacher may feel that some outside activities should be curtailed in the interests of schoolwork. There may be a suspicion that undue time goes to radio or television. Probably the teacher will do a good deal of quiet open-minded listening to learn what the parents' thinking is. It may come out that homework is done in a hit-or-miss fashion, and the teacher may suggest the possibility of a regular time for it, with time for other activities budgeted accordingly. This may suggest to the teacher the wisdom of discussing time-budgeting some day in school.

It may come out that the parents resort to what almost amounts to nagging to get homework done, which will explain in part why it seems so burdensome to them. The teacher may want to suggest that the youngster who has any great amount of homework could very well be left with the responsibility for getting it done, since the way to learn to take responsibility is to have a chance to take it. The parents who set forth on such a course may need considerable encouragement if they have been accustomed to taking all the responsibility themselves.

If parents complain of too little homework, the teacher may want to explain that it is believed children do need varied activities and that it seems best to have schoolwork done at school, leaving out-of-school time free for other affairs. Mention may be made that school facilities are set up for study and that helping children to learn good work habits is looked upon as part of the school's job. Attention may be called to the way children who are interested in some school project spend hours in gathering materials for a piece of construction, or in making costumes for a play, or in getting information from this person and that

on community history, or in searching through books for needed facts, or in learning lines for a play, or in setting copy for the school newspaper. All of this, the teacher may point out, is homework; homework with strong interest back of it. A teacher may point out, too, that the child's out-of-school experiences—his play, his social activities, his hobby pursuits, his money-earning experiences—all are full of learnings useful in school.

An interview in which teacher and parents discuss homework will probably bring out a good many ideas that are food for thought.

6. Parents feel that teacher should know about a family emergency that may affect the child's schoolwork.

The home life may be upset for a number of reasons: perhaps the mother has been called away suddenly, or the father is off on a prolonged business trip, or a divorce is pending, or a sudden move is necessary, or one of the parents must go to the hospital, or there is a death in the family.

The parent may want to speak of what the child knows of the situation, how it has been explained to him, how he has reacted to it at home. Perhaps the child has not been told anything about it and the parents want to talk about whether to tell him and, if so, how and when. The teacher may suggest that a child often worries much more and is more upset when he does not know what is going on than when he is in on it all and so feels a part of the family. A direct, forthright, honest explanation can be very reassuring. There may be mention that in time of family crisis a child often needs added reassurance of the parents' love, so that he won't feel brushed off or pushed aside.

If a death has occurred, perhaps the parents wonder how best to answer the child's questions; or maybe there have been no questions and the parents wonder what explanation to make. If it is a divorce that is pending, they may wonder how to prepare the child for it. Although a teacher will probably realize that it is best not to give specific advice, she would be quite right to

100 SITUATIONS OFTEN OCCASIONING INTERVIEWS

suggest the importance of being straightforward in telling the child about the situation, giving plenty of love and companionship, and being ready to answer questions honestly.

The teacher may mention that no one can tell another what to say about death, because it all depends upon individual belief. However one may explain it, the fact that the child is free to talk about it, to question, and to have some explanation has a great deal to do with his taking it in his stride. In the case of divorce, it is a help if the child can know that Mother and Daddy will still be good friends. If they are not, then it is best that he should not have to take sides. In matters such as these a teacher can be helpful without getting into the dangerous position of giving advice.

Any suggestions given should be in terms of things helpful to the child. For example, bedtime is a time when a child's fears and uncertainties catch up with him, so, when there is some crisis, it is a good idea to give him some extra loving then. Or letting a child work along with the parent more than usual in the doing of household affairs helps to give the needed feeling of being necessary in the emergency. Or keeping the child's routine as near to the usual as possible helps in keeping things stable for him. Or no point should be made, either at home or at school, about any temporary slump in schoolwork. School interest may be just the thing to help the youngster to keep on an even keel. Teacher and parent will probably want to compare notes frequently on how things are going.

7. Parent comes to ask the teacher's help about some problem with the child at home.

Perhaps it is a matter of eating, and mealtime is described as a battleground. The youngster won't eat and the parent is worried. Or it may be bedtime that is the scene of trouble, with the child resistant to sleep and adept at putting it off. Or maybe the child is fully able to dress himself but dillydallies about doing it, and there has to be constant urging to get clothes on and

breakfast down in time to get to school. Such difficulties will have a familiar sound to any teacher of young children. The problem may be that the child does not quite tell the truth, or perhaps it may be defiance and refusal to do what is asked or demanded. Often as the child gets older and goes farther afield for play there is the story of disregard of the appointed time for coming home. Perhaps it is bad language that causes the concern, or the youngster may be running with companions the parents do not like. There may be deceitfulness in meeting forbidden friends. It may be that the teen-ager is doing more dating than the parents approve. Or athletics may be taking so much attention that the parents are worried about academic standing.

The teacher may see the story of resistance at mealtime or bedtime as probably only one part of a general picture of resistance to too many demands or to too rigid insistence that things be done just so. The teacher may suspect that the older child's disregard for rules and defiance of authority had its roots way back in early childhood, and that the difficulty lies in the child-parent relationships, finding its expression in incidents that loom up as baffling and annoying.

The parents may not be at all ready to hear about these things that the teacher is thinking. They have come for help on a specific problem and they want help on that. They want help that will work, but a teacher needs to be cautious about giving any *cut-and-dried directions to do this or do that*. Only the parents themselves can figure out what *they* can do with *their* child in *their* home. The most a teacher can do is to help them think it out. Certainly she will want to let interest and willingness to help be fully evident.

It is usually a good idea to do a lot of listening, letting the parents tell their story in their own way. Sometimes a question can be dropped in to help them think of significant points, such as, "What have you done about it?" Later on, after they have told that, perhaps, "How did you feel it worked out?" Later, perhaps, or maybe earlier, "Why do you think he does it?" Parents will probably have some theories about why the child does

whatever it is. The teacher may or may not agree, but usually it is better to let the matter pass with only perhaps a question of, "Why do you think he feels that way?" Of course, this does not mean that these are always the questions that should be asked. It only means that a teacher is wise to be slow to express an opinion or to offer a solution, but instead help the parents in thinking through the matter themselves. A few questions of this sort are useful in doing that.

It is important that parents leave the interview with the feeling that the teacher is an interested friend who is glad to work with them for the good of their youngster, and the feeling that they as parents can work the matter out. The teacher may suggest that they study over all the different situations in which resistance occurs to see what seems to cause it in each instance; or that they pay particular attention to what the child's feelings are about their reaction to the things he does or doesn't do; or that they examine what they say and the way they say it to see if that has any bearing on the child's actions. The matter of their relationships with the child; their ideas of obedience and of the respect a child should show for parents; their feelings about authority, punishment, and discipline; all are significant factors, but these are things that can come up later. The teacher may already have an inkling about some of their viewpoints, both from things said at this interview and things observed about the youngster at school. The teacher may want, before the interview ends, to speak favorably of some school accomplishment of the child's or of some helpful thing he has done, or to show some of his work.

8. Parents feel that school parties are lasting too late and wish the school would do something about it.

Often parents hesitate to lay down the law to their own child about party hours when others are allowed to stay late lest it set the youngster apart from the group. Teachers often are concerned, too, about party hours, because they see schoolwork

suffering and because they feel that the young people are getting too sophisticated too soon. Except for actual school affairs, the matter lies outside the teacher's jurisdiction, and even then as a school affair, it is more for the administrator than for the teacher to handle. When parents bring it up, though, it may confirm their feelings to find the teacher agreeing, and that may bring the needed encouragement to try to remedy the situation. The teacher may mention other parents known to be similarly concerned and may suggest the possibility of several getting together to consider agreeing upon an ending hour to which all will expect their youngsters to adhere. When all have the same rules, the problem of being different from the crowd diminishes.

The teacher may suggest a joint meeting of parents and some of the young people who are leaders, so that all viewpoints could be aired and considered and so the agreement can be one in which the young people have had a voice. There may be instances to cite when the young people have made wise decisions, and the teacher may welcome the opportunity to bring these up and to express confidence in their good judgment and common sense.

9. The parents are planning a trip covering several weeks and want to see what arrangements can be made about the child's being out of school.

The parents may have seen the administrator to find out whether or not the time away will jeopardize school credit, or to ask whether work done in another school will be accepted, or to see what work might be assigned for the child to do while away. He may have suggested that they talk with the teacher to see what assignments might be worked out. If they have come to the teacher first it may have been suggested that they find out what the administrator will say about credits and then come back to talk about assignments. In any case they will probably, sooner or later, be talking with the teacher about the details of work to be covered.

If the family is to be located in one place during the time away

it may be suggested that sending the child to school there would be a good idea, not only as a means of keeping up with school subjects but also in the interests of regular work habits. The teacher may speak of the possibility, if the administrator approves, of writing to the school where the child will go to tell the kind of experiences his present group has been having and the type of work it has been doing in the various school subjects. She may suggest that the trip will offer some excellent writing opportunities, both for the child going away and for the group left behind. He could let them know about his new experiences and they could keep him up-to-date on happenings in the home school. The teacher in the new school might want the two groups to take up a correspondence, perhaps exchanging samples of work being done. With an older child there might be reports bringing information on the topics being discussed in a different part of the country; such as a report on the leading local industry, or the type of crops grown, or the housing situation in that locality, or the birds, rocks, or shells of the area.

If the family is to be travelling so that school attendance is not possible, the teacher may speak of arrangements that can be made for assignments to be sent at regular intervals, with the finished work to be returned for comment. Here, too, if it is an older child there might be reports that would benefit both the child and the group. A child of any age, from kindergarten up, could bring back to the group collections of whatever the area being visited offers. The teacher may mention that having a child think of things to do for the group helps him to feel one of them even though he is away. It also serves to point up the experiences he will be having, instead of letting them slip by with only casual attention. A teacher sometimes feels that it is a great nuisance to have a child drop out and then come back almost as a new member of the group. However, it can all be made to serve a good purpose when teacher and parents plan together so that the child will have experiences ready to tell the others about and things to show them.

10. Parents are dissatisfied with the behavior of the children on the school bus.

The parents may complain that the child dreads the ride because of the teasing of the other children. Or they may tell of language being used which they do not want their child to hear. Or there may be general rough-housing, with the child coming home in a disheveled condition because of his part in it. They may complain that the teacher who makes the trip with the children is not strict enough. Or if the driver is the only adult on the bus, the parents may believe a teacher should be present.

The teacher with whom the parents are talking may suggest that the matter is one which should be discussed with the administrator, since children from all grades travel on the bus and bus arrangements are therefore handled by the administrative office. The administrator might be able to come into the interview or a later appointment might be made for him to talk together with the parents and the teacher. The teacher may ask the parents to tell more about what happens on the bus; perhaps more about how the teasing is done and what their child does, or about what the language is to which they object, or about the nature of the rough-housing.

When the administrator comes in there may be some discussion of the bus rules that the children are supposed to follow, or of the possibility of having more teacher-supervision on the trips. He may mention the heavy teaching schedules which prevent assigning any additional teachers for bus duty, and may suggest that perhaps the PTA would give consideration to asking some parents to take turns at it. The teacher may suggest that the whole matter be discussed with the children to see if they could work out a way to handle the situation themselves. It may be suggested that each of the older ones take responsibility for one or two younger ones, or that the group divide into committees which would be responsible for keeping behavior orderly. It may be pointed out that children often resent

police action from other children and that more instead of less trouble might result. This might bring up the possibility of the children themselves formulating a set of rules to which they would agree to adhere.

In this kind of discussion with parents the teacher has an opportunity to mention how each situation that comes up can be used to help the children in learning to handle their own affairs intelligently and independently.

11. The parents want the child to skip a grade.

It may be that there are two children in the family and the parents would like to have them together. Most of the child's friends may be in the next grade and they feel he would be happier there. They may feel that he does not have enough to do where he is, or they may just be ambitious to have him get ahead. In any case, this is a matter for teacher and parents to consider thoughtfully and, sooner or later, the administrator probably will also come in on it. The parents may have approached him first and have been told to get the teacher's ideas on the subject and then to come back to him.

The teacher will undoubtedly do a good deal of listening at first, in order to find out just why the parents want to have the child move on ahead of his group. Now and then the teacher may ask a question, perhaps about the possible effect on the child of undertaking new work without the background that he would get by staying with his grade, or about how he'd feel to move in with a group of children older than he. If the skipping would mean catching up with a brother or sister, the effect on that child would be something to consider.

The teacher may point out that, although the child is very quick at the school subjects, he is just now learning how to get along easily with the other children, and that it might be very difficult for him to have to plunge into adjustments with a new group. Or she may mention that he does well enough with the school subjects but that taking up more advanced work might

put him under a strain that would take a great deal of the enjoyment out of school for him.

The teacher may feel that the move to another grade is just the challenge that the child needs, the only question being when and how the change best be made. There may be agreement that he would be better off to be with his friends, if most of them are in the next grade, even though the academic work may be hard for him. Perhaps illness held him back one time when they went on and, having worked hard to make the work up, the encouragement of being moved on is what is needed.

If it is the ambition of the parents that lies back of the suggestion that the move be made, the teacher will probably speak of how much it means to a child to have the opportunity to enjoy each of his school years to the fullest without being pushed and hurried through them. The teacher may explain that learning is a progressive thing and may describe disadvantages under which a child works when he is asked to jump from here to there without taking the intervening steps.

Chances are that, before the interview is over, the teacher will want to ask the administrator to come in, since the skipping of a grade is a matter on which he would have the final word. It can be a great help to both teacher and parents to have his thought on the matter, because he can see it from an over-all point of view.

One could go on indefinitely recounting the situations that teachers and parents frequently talk over together. Soon it becomes a matter of deciding what to leave out rather than what to include. When teacher and parents can get the feeling that they are just three people who are very much interested in the same youngster there will be no lack of things to talk about. A teacher should, however, give plenty of thought to keeping an interview purposeful, to keeping it from becoming time idly spent in loose talk. It can be free and easy and yet be purposeful, and the teacher is the one to keep it so.

8. Things told or asked

THERE WILL BE MANY THINGS ABOUT SCHOOL that the teacher will want to be sure to tell the parents; some will be little things and some big, but all of them will be important because they have to do with bringing a child's school life and his home life together. There will be other things that a teacher eventually will want to ask the parents about, things that only they can tell. It will be natural to mention some of these at once; others it will be just as natural to leave until later. One soon becomes sensitive as to when it is best to ask and when to wait. As conversation continues, things will come out incidentally which a teacher will store away as significant information; significant even though it was not requested, and even though no comment was made. Some of this incidental information may suggest questions to be asked later.

In this, as in all else, each interview will be different from every other in specific details; however, there are certain general things that a teacher will probably find it helpful to tell or to ask about. It is some of these that are mentioned here together with the type of information that often comes out incidentally as teacher and parents talk together.

A. Types of Things a Teacher May Want To Tell

1. What the day's program is and why it is planned as it is.

A child often goes through a whole school year without the parents ever knowing, except in a sketchy way, when he does what. It may not occur to the teacher to tell or to the parent to ask; yet, since it is the schedule for the child's school time for that year, it does seem important for the parents to know what it is. Presumably the day's schedule has been planned as it is for good reasons, which may well be explained.

If it is a young child, the teacher may tell the parents of a flexible schedule that is planned in big blocks of time, with different activities provided for in some such way as follows: Arrival, 8:30-9:00; Free activity, building, painting, discussion, reading, 9:00-10:30; Snack, rest, 10:30-10:45; Music, stories, shop, numbers, 10:45-12:00; Reading, writing, spelling (if the time has come for these) 1:00-2:00; Snack, rest, 2:00-2:30; Free play, 2:30-3:00. The teacher may explain that children need some plan for orderly living and that the flexible schedule furnishes this without any of the rigidity and strain that comes with a program made up of small time units in which the youngsters stop and start on the split second all day. It may be mentioned that certain periods are set as they are because the music or art specialist comes in then. The teacher may tell of shifting the different activities as seems to fit the occasion. Perhaps the use of the gym or the playground is the deciding factor in some time arrangement. Whatever the reasons are, it is good for parents to know how their child spends his day.

Parents of an older child probably will have heard from him about the way his school activities are arranged. Even so, they may be interested in hearing from the teacher the whys and wherefores of the arrangement. There may be mention of varying schedules for different days of the week, with social studies or the sciences or some other subject coming in the morning on

certain days and in the afternoon on other days. Something is likely to be said about the independent work periods, which give opportunity for some of the children to carry on their own enterprises while the teacher is busy with the others. The teacher may speak of the schedule shifting at times because of some unit of work that calls for a grouping of activities, as when a study of transportation is going on and some of the children are busy reading up on some phase of it, others writing about it, others perhaps working up a dramatic skit showing its progressive development, others arranging an exhibit of the models which still others may be making. It may be pointed out that the schedule is shifted in such an instance so that the children can see and feel the usefulness of the different school subjects in carrying on something in which they are interested, and further, so they can see the different subjects in their interrelationships, instead of as isolated units. If the school is one where the schedule is rigid and fixed, with periods for the different subjects that cannot be changed or shifted, the parents will undoubtedly be interested in hearing from the teacher the reasons for its being so.

Parents of high school boys and girls will probably be familiar with the recitation periods their youngster has, but they may be glad to hear from the teacher why the so-called extracurricular activities are scheduled just as thoughtfully as the various subject-matter courses. There may be mention of the feeling that these offer such valuable opportunities for social living, group planning, and individual initiative that they are looked upon as part of the regular program. Something may be said, too, about scheduled and supervised study periods being an important part of the schedule, since they are one means for the learning of good work habits. If there are recreation or rest periods, these may be spoken of as helping to provide balance in the day's activities. It may be pointed out that, at time of registration, attention is given to helping students plan their program so that their school day will show a good balance.

Whatever the day's schedule is, parents are likely to be inter-

ested in knowing about the thought that has gone into deciding what it shall be.

2. Rules and Regulations.

Each school, of course, has its general rules, and each room has its specific ones. The children may or may not tell their parents what these are. Whether they do or not, it is good for parents to hear what the teacher has to say about them. Maybe it will be explained that the children help to make the rules; that they consider the situation and then decide with the teacher what to them seems fair and expedient to do. There may be some form of student government to be explained.

The teacher may mention wanting the children to be free to use initiative and to express their ideas, but, at the same time, feeling that wisely-made rules are necessary in helping them to know where limits lie and to observe these limits. With little children a geographical limit may be set, and they know that they may not go beyond a certain post, or walk, or fence. It may be a limit made necessary by consideration for other people and their rights, such as the requirement that one must wait to talk until another is finished, or that things a child is using shall not be snatched away by another, or that a child's possessions may not be taken without his permission. As the children get older, the teacher will speak of other kinds of limits, but those having to do with consideration for others will last through all the school years. Limits may be set on the amount of extracurricular activity in which the student may participate, or on the number of field trips he may take in connection with this activity, or on the number of absences that will be excused, and so on.

The teacher may speak about the need for the impersonal authority that wisely-made rules provide; about the need to learn to live in obedience to reasonable law. Mention may be made of the desire that the children see the need for rules and willingly take the responsibility for making them. A teacher of young

children will probably tell of instances when the children first begin voluntarily to make rules in their play together, and she may relate how they change these to suit the mood of the moment as the play goes on. There may be mention that children want rules for orderly living; that rules which they are able to carry out give them a certain security through knowing what is expected of them. Probably something will be said about not having so many rules that the children will forget them and not making rules that would seem so unreasonable to the children that they would resist them. The teacher may say that she wants the children to help make the rules when they can, but that she recognizes that, when they do not have the experience necessary for doing so, it is the teacher who must do it. Even then, it will probably be pointed out that the reasons for the rules are talked over with the children so that obedience will be with understanding.

Mention of obedience is likely to bring up a discussion of it, both at school and at home. A teacher does well to be able to tell clearly what kind of obedience is wanted from the children—whether unquestioning obedience to authority, willing compliance with the rules that are made and the things that are asked, or understanding participation in deciding what is best to do and then responsibility for doing it.

The teacher of older children may speak of wanting gradually to shift the greater part of the responsibility for making rules to the boys and girls themselves. Mention may be made that any difficult situations which come up *are looked upon as an opportunity* for the youngsters to get experience, not only in deciding how to handle the specific situation, but also in deciding what rules and regulations are needed to guide their actions another time. Something may be said about wanting the children to learn to be obedient to the rules they have established even when no person is there to enforce them.

The teacher may not want to go into all of this at first. She may simply tell the parents the general school regulations about time of arrival, excuses for absence, attendance requirements,

health regulations, and the like, leaving more detailed discussion for later interviews.

3. Lunch arrangements at school.

If the school is one where lunch is served as part of the day's program and is included in the tuition, as is the case in many private nursery schools and kindergartens, the teacher may want to tell the parents about the menus, perhaps saying that a copy of the one for each week will be sent home, or that it will always be on the bulletin board, or both. It may be of interest to tell where and how lunch is served: whether in the schoolroom or in a corner of the cafeteria; whether at small tables or with all the children at one big table; whether brought to the children already served on the plates or served family style at the table; whether the children are required to eat all that is served or whether it is recognized that appetites vary from day to day; whether or not grace is said at table. All these are little details, but telling them lets the parents know what their children do and why.

If the school has a lunchroom or cafeteria, the teacher may tell whether the children go there as a group with the teacher or individually; whether each group is seated together or according to individual choice; what guidance the teacher gives in food selection, if any. There may be details to mention about lunch money, when it should be brought, and how much. The teacher may tell how the handling of lunch money is utilized as a natural opportunity for some practical arithmetic.

If the children bring their lunch from home, the teacher will doubtless want to talk with the parents about the type and amount of lunch that seems desirable. Parents often welcome suggestions of things for school lunch that will ease the monotony of daily sandwiches and better provide for varied food values. If milk is available at school to supplement home-brought lunches, the teacher will need to explain about milk money and when to bring it.

The teacher may want to tell about the arrangements for eating lunch that make it a social occasion instead of merely a matter of getting food down. There may be mention of what the children talk about as they eat, of progress there has been in some of the niceties of eating, of how the children take responsibility for getting the tables ready, and of how this or that eating difficulty is working out. As the discussion of lunch arrangements gets under way, parents will probably begin telling about the child's eating at home, about his food likes and dislikes, perhaps about table manners they despair of teaching, and about eating difficulties and what has been done about them.

If the school has a nutritionist, she, rather than the teacher, may be the person who will talk with parents about lunch arrangements. She may do it at one of the first general PTA meetings, or perhaps at PTA room meetings. Even so, there are likely to be details for the teacher to discuss with parents, particularly the teacher of young children.

4. Things that are done to make reading enjoyable and meaningful and to provide plenty of practice.

If the child is in the lower grades, the teacher may want to mention the great amount of informal reading that goes on, such as the reading of labels to get materials that are needed, the reading of other children's names to see who is responsible for this or that duty, the reading of charts where a group experience has been recorded, and the reading of some experience of the teacher's own that has been written on the board. The library corner may be mentioned and the parents may be shown the books that are there—some easy ones, some harder ones—to fit different reading abilities.

If the child is farther along in the grades, the teacher may speak of the reading that is incidental to setting up a puppet show, writing a historical skit for a school affair, following out some hobby, or getting out the school news-sheet. It may be pointed out that there is a great amount of reading done that is

not in the reading textbook. Even comic-book reading may come in for discussion. There may be mention of children's magazines that are both interesting and useful and of the opportunities made for leisure-time reading, either in the regular schoolroom or in the school library.

If there is a school library, the teacher may explain how the different rooms have their assigned days for using it, how individual children are free to go there (with permission) to look up information needed for classroom work, or how small groups go in for help from the librarian in learning how to find needed material.

5. Child's progress in use of materials.

A teacher often notices details of progress that parents enjoy hearing about. No matter if it does seem to be a little thing, if it is progress it is worth telling. It may be the kindergarten child's progress in holding scissors so that they will cut, in getting paste on smoothly instead of in lumps, in folding up doll clothes so that they will go into the dresser drawer, or in setting blocks one atop the other so that the building will stand up. It may be the progress of a child in the early grades, maybe in weaving that results in a rug for the doll house, in getting the boat made so that it will sail, in painting simple stage sets that the children accept for use, or in putting together a costume for the play.

If the child is an older one, the progress mentioned may show in making a model plane true in detail, in constructing frames for paintings to be shown at the school exhibit, or in making the paintings themselves. Or it may be in making a garment, modeling a vase or bowl, upholstering a chair, or making a piece of furniture. It is a good idea for a teacher to be on the lookout for all such bits of progress to tell the parents, because it is the little bits of progress that make up the bigger things. It is encouraging to both parents and children to have them noticed and commented upon. Often they get lost in the shuffle. Sometimes things done with the hands come in for less comment than the work

which is more academic in nature. A teacher does well to give dignity and importance to both.

6. Child's progress in school subjects.

When a teacher makes a point of telling parents about bits of progress in reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and other school subjects, it does a great deal to bolster their confidence that these things really *are* being learned, even though perhaps in a different way than they themselves were taught. It is a good idea to mention to parents specifically how their child has improved—perhaps in ability to read silently and grasp the meaning sufficiently to tell the main points of what is read to the group, perhaps in being able to compute the lunch-money accounts accurately, perhaps in writing some story or a column for the school newspaper with fewer and fewer misspelled words, perhaps in tracing on the map the route of some early explorer or the trip of a classmate. Parents have a right to know what their children are learning, and often it is just as encouraging to the teacher to recount it as it is to the parents to hear it.

As the child moves on in the grades the teacher may speak of improved facility in expressing ideas verbally to the group, in the organizing of ideas in written form, or in effective reading aloud, either for others' information or entertainment. Or the progress may be in the ability to read and follow detailed directions for some piece of construction, in the accurate computation of some needed set of measurements, or in the working out of a suitable design for some school poster.

Often more progress is taking place than either student or parents realize, and the teacher's speaking of it brings the recognition of achievement.

7. Show children's workbooks and explain their use.

It is often of great interest to parents to hear how well-selected, carefully set-up workbooks can provide good practice in school

subjects, serve to show where the child needs help, and offer opportunity for some independent work experience. A teacher who uses them in these ways will emphasize that they are not used merely as time fillers, but that they can be made to accomplish useful purposes.

Some teachers make their own workbooks for the children so that they can include things that go on in the room. Perhaps children and teacher make the books together. Parents will be interested in knowing how it is done—how the workbook grows, with page after page added as the weeks go by. The teacher may tell of the conversations with the children about what shall be included, how the children draw the pictures or make the figures, how it is all talked over again to decide which ones shall be used, and how the children watch as the teacher does the printing. Or maybe the children have reached the place where they can do some of the printing themselves. They may be learning to do it on the typewriter. Anyway the hectographing of the sheets for each child and how the children often help to do the hectographing will be something to tell the parents about. Some may want to know where to get a hectograph for home use.

Since it is better not to make comparisons among the children, it may seem wise to show parents only their own child's workbook and to comment on the progress that his book shows he is making, leaving comments about the books of others until their parents come.

8. Kind of discussions teacher and children have together.

The discussions that teacher and children have together are important enough for parents to know about, whether it be the fragmentary one in the nursery school or the more detailed ones of high school. The reasons for having discussions are as important as the subjects discussed. There may be mention of the realization that the children, little ones and big ones alike, have their reasons for what they do, their opinions about things that

go on, and their wonderings about many matters, and that it seems a good idea to let them have a chance to speak their thoughts.

The teacher of little children may tell of discussions about where to locate the doll corner, how to care for a pet, where to place the library table, who shall be invited to the Christmas party and how invitations shall be worded, how to behave on a trip, or what to do about undue splashing and squirting of water in the bathroom. These are simple things, it is true, but they are important because they offer opportunity for learning the beginnings of the ways of democratic living, where all concerned can speak up and have their ideas considered.

The teacher of older children may tell of such discussions as what to do about air being let out of bicycle tires, what the group can do for their part in the all-school parents' day, what work shall be contributed for the school exhibit, how pets shall be cared for over vacation, what shall be said in the letter to the room's pen-pal in another country, what to do for a hospitalized classmate, how to rearrange the room for more effective work, and who shall do what for class day. It is often of great interest to parents to hear of the range of things discussed and to know that the teacher looks upon it all as a part of living together democratically.

9. Helpful things the child does.

Most parents are eager for their children to be "good" and to have the teacher's approval. It is encouraging and heart-warming for them to hear about helpful, thoughtful things that the youngster does, even if it is only some little thing like offering to clean up the paint jars, helping another child to get galoshes on, rejoicing over another's achievements, saying (as did one eight-year-old) "Come on kids, let's cut it out," when several were giving a new child a rough time.

A teacher can easily get the habit of noticing and remembering all these little things; perhaps jotting them down so they will not

be forgotten. It gives them something of the dignity they deserve. It lifts them out of the day's affairs for notice, not merely as a helpful act but as evidence of desirable character traits in the making; as something to cherish and nurture. It shows that the teacher recognizes that the matters of fine living in human relationships are just as important as the more obvious book-learning.

It is not only the parents of younger children who like to hear of their youngster's thoughtfulness; the parents of older children, right on through high school, like to hear of it, too. They have probably worked ever since the child was little to teach him to be helpful and thoughtful, and it is sure to be a great satisfaction to hear that he is. Often as the boy or girl gets into high school, with its departmentalized classes, there seems to be no one teacher to speak of things other than academic achievement. Yet every teacher with whom the student has a class could probably tell of ready willingness to do an errand; of help freely given to a classmate on some piece of shopwork, on the cutting out of a dress, on a tough Latin translation, or whatever may be; or of voluntarily helping to set the room in order at the end of class. A teacher who begins to look for such things as these to tell the parents is frequently surprised to find how many there are.

10. The things to which the teacher is giving special emphasis.

One teacher emphasizes certain things; another teacher emphasizes other things. It is good for parents to know what is being held up to the children as important, to know where their sights are being set at school. Perhaps it is being fair and honest in every detail, always giving a correct report of what happens so far as one knows it, not trying to slip out of work or responsibility, not pushing blame onto the other fellow, and so on. Or maybe emphasis is put on thinking about the Golden Rule, considering other children's feelings, listening to what they have to say, respecting their possessions, not riding rough-shod over their ideas, and so forth.

It may be good work habits on which a teacher puts great emphasis, trying to help the children to learn to think over what is to be done, to set about doing it promptly, to keep materials in good working order, to work along steadily without too much attention to distractions, and to follow through till the thing undertaken is finished. Another teacher may put major emphasis on the children's thinking independently, on their using initiative in going ahead and doing things, or on their planning together with less and less teacher direction and with more and more reason to have confidence in their own judgment. Such a teacher will probably tell with satisfaction how the children bubbled over with ideas on some project, how they carried on efficiently one day when there had to be a substitute, or how they have handled matters of student government with fairness and good judgment.

As teachers tell where they put emphasis, parents will also speak of what seems important to them. Both teacher and parents may tell of talks with the children on these matters. The teacher may speak not only of talking about things such as these with the group but also of discussing them in individual interviews with the children. Parents may be surprised to hear of the teacher having individual interviews with the children, especially if they are young children. They will probably be very interested in the teacher's feeling that even little children need an opportunity for private conversation with the teacher about the ways of living. There may be mention that from early childhood on a youngster is building his philosophy of living and that it seems important for a teacher to take the time to talk with him about these things as well as about academic work.

11. The child's part in the group living of the schoolroom.

This discussion assumes that teacher and children really work and play and plan and live together as a group. In some schoolrooms there is little if any group living. Several children may gather together around the teacher for this and that, but it takes

more than being together to make a group. It takes thinking and planning together, and interchanging ideas, and knowing and caring how others feel. When this is going on, a teacher naturally wants to tell parents what their child's part in it all is and to hear what the parents see coming out of it.

The teacher may tell how the child waits and considers and weighs ideas before coming to a decision, how there is always readiness to take on responsibility, how uncertainty in taking responsibility is giving way to more confidence, how the youngster stands off and looks on unless the teacher draws him in, or how he is right in the middle of all that goes on, perhaps becoming daily more able to see others' ideas as useful or perhaps showing that quality of leadership from the start. Mention may be made of the teacher's place in the group—sometimes offering ideas, pointing out pros and cons of suggestions the children make, weeding out inadvisable ideas, providing the wherewithal to carry out ideas, or giving a bit of help in getting the group organized, serving as guide, consultant, friend, and final authority when need be.

These are only samples of the many things that the teacher may want to tell the parents about school life as the interview goes on. Any teacher will think of dozens of things to tell. One need never feel that an item is too unimportant to mention; nothing is unimportant which will give parents an insight into what goes on during the child's school living.

B. Some Things About Which the Teacher May Want to Ask the Parents

There seems almost no end to the things that are useful for a teacher to know and that no one but the parents can tell. Only a few can be suggested here. Each teacher can make up an individual list as a general guide. What is asked will vary from child to child and it may take many interviews before there will be the opportunity to ask about some of the things that would help in understanding the youngster. One would want to be watchful

not to bore the parents with too many questions all at once and to be watchful never to be inquisitive or prying, only interested and concerned with understanding the child.

The inquiries suggested here are intentionally of such a general nature that a teacher who is just starting on interviewing can feel comfortable about mentioning them since they are matters about which parents are likely to talk freely. Even so, all of them are important to know about, and are things that any teacher will probably ask. In studying them over one will readily recognize that some pertain to younger children, some to older, some to any age. No effort is made to group them, since each teacher necessarily will make individual selection. Only the most casual suggestion is given for the comments the teacher may want to make on the things asked about. As a matter of fact, it may be a good idea to do more listening than commenting. There is always the temptation to do all the talking, and, when one has asked parents about this or that, it is a good time to listen.

1. What school activities does the child talk most about at home?

It is always interesting to know which school activities the child speaks about and to know what he says about them pro and con. Parents will probably be ready enough to relate comments the child has made about different activities he enjoys, or about his part in them, or about the part other children have taken in them. It may take a little encouragement at first to get parents to tell of adverse comments, and usually it is best not to push them about it, though it is as helpful to know what a child objects to and why as it is to know what he likes.

It will be a great surprise to some parents to find that a teacher wants to know about the unfavorable things a child says about schoolwork, but it can be very helpful to know them. It will be an even greater surprise to some to have a teacher ask for any unfavorable comments on things the teacher says or does, yet it can be very helpful to know these, too, if one can take it without becoming immediately defensive. Often there will be expla-

nation, *not* given defensively, which will help the parents to see the situation and to know how to meet the child's comments. Or maybe the child has a point worth considering.

The teacher may round out the picture of some activity that the child has spoken of or may mention things in which an interest has been shown but which he did not tell the parents about.

As conversation continues, one will get an idea of how the parents themselves feel about the different things the youngster is doing, which ones they are glad to see him busy about, which, if any, they think are a waste of school time, which they encourage him to go on with at home.

The manner in which the parents' comments are received will go a long way in determining whether or not they are going to feel comfortable about telling what the youngster has said about what he does and in speaking of how they feel about it. A teacher does well to remember that the question was asked to get an understanding of the child's feeling about school activities, so whatever the parents tell will be helpful and it is wise to accept it just as it is told, without any air of being surprised or shocked or disapproving.

2. What are the child's play materials at home?

Some parents may tell at once of the child's toys. Others may speak of all sorts of things that the youngster turns to his play purposes. The story may be of a box of dress-up clothes that afford hours of fun, or of a box of odds and ends of lumber with which he makes strange and wonderful things, or of bottles of colored water that are filled and refilled for the shelves of the backyard store.

Parents of a young child, as they tell of his toys, are apt to speak of their feeling about his having few or many and about the place provided for storing them and the care he is expected to take of them. Parents of older children may tell of interest in a certain type of toy carrying on from early childhood and now becoming a hobby. Maybe the girl who was devoted to dolls as

a little child is keeping all her dolls and adding now for a doll collection. Or the boy who from the beginning was keenly interested in trains perhaps is going in now for making models.

Mention may be made of providing a variety of play materials so that the play experiences can be many and varied, or it may be evident that little thought has been given to the matter, the child having been left to play with whatever he could lay his hands upon. In any case whatever is said will serve to give the teacher some understanding of the reasons lying back of the youngster's reactions to materials at school. Mention may be made of this, perhaps with an account of how the child welcomed school toys as old friends and immediately got busy about playing, or of how he took time before venturing to experiment with the school toys.

3. What pets does the child have or has he had?

The parents' feelings about pets will come out in the answers to this sort of question. Some will show plainly that they love them, some just as plainly that they do not. Some will tell of putting up with them for the child's sake. Some will say they will not have them around. Some will speak of having a pet of some kind even though living space is limited and the pet perhaps can be no more than goldfish. Others will have given little thought to the matter. If there is a family dog or cat, there are sure to be stories of the fun that the youngster and pet have together, of mutual devotion, of bits of responsibility that the child takes for the pet's care. It all gives a glimpse of family living. All is a valuable part of getting acquainted.

The parents may want to know about school pets, and, if there are any, the teacher can show them and speak of the children's enjoyment of them and the responsibility they take for their care.

4. What responsibility does the child have at home?

Perhaps there will be the account of increasing responsibility as the child grows older, beginning with such things as the little

child's bringing in the milk bottle, emptying waste baskets, or picking up newspapers if the family is the scattering kind, and going on later to care of his own room, dishwashing, looking after the furnace, or doing family errands. Some parents may speak of their convictions that taking responsibility is something every child should begin to learn very early. Others may feel that childhood should be a carefree time, with responsibility coming all too soon. Some may tell of the child's eager assumption of this responsibility or that and of their satisfaction in having him see what needs to be done and voluntarily taking on the job. Whatever the parents say about home responsibility, pro or con, will throw light on the child's feeling about responsibility at school.

5. What children does the child play with outside of school?

Information on this may very well help a teacher to understand the child's relationships with other children as observed at school. Parents may tell of brothers or sisters, of relatives' children who are seen frequently, or of a neighborhood crowd of assorted ages of which this child was a part from babyhood on. Or they may tell of there being few children near at hand and of taking the child to a public playground for needed companionship. Or the story may be one of an only child whose contacts with other children have been primarily at school and at summer camp. In the recountal parents are likely to speak of how the child gets along with home playmates and to reveal their own feelings about the child's companions.

Parents of older children may speak of the gang the boy is in with or of the secret clubs the girl is always helping to organize, and if there is any worry or concern about these it is likely to come out in their comments. There may be mention of dating and of the parents' satisfaction with the boy or girl's choice of friends, or of their wish that dating might be longer delayed, or of the regulations that they have laid down to keep him in line.

Sometimes a teacher will want to ask further about the child's special friends, about where the neighborhood crowd plays and

what they play, about whether they visit each other's homes, belong to the same clubs, go to camp together or not. It all helps in knowing better how to help a child with school relationships.

6. What kind of discipline does he respond to best?

Asking the question in this way suggests the teacher's understanding that for the most part parents do try to find the discipline that is best for their child. The bare question, "How do you discipline?" seems abrupt and likely to make parents wonder what they "ought" to say. As they tell of what works best, they will be likely to mention the punishments to which the child has been accustomed and to tell why they believe in the punishment they use. They may speak of what they take as evidence that it has been effective, or perhaps they will tell how they have prevented the necessity for much of any punishment.

Some parents will tell of their belief that physical punishment is a necessary part of growing up, mentioning perhaps that this child has not needed much, or perhaps that it is and always has been used frequently. Some will speak of using physical punishment only as a last resort, preferring deprivation of privileges to the laying on of hands, with mention maybe that the latter worked with one child, the former with another. There will probably be little mention of physical punishment for big boys and girls both because it may not often be used and because of the idea that the teacher would not approve. Some will speak of exacting strict and unquestioning obedience and of punishing when such obedience is not forthcoming. Others will tell of holding a firm hand when the child was young and giving more and more freedom as he learned how to use it, hoping thereby to help him to learn to take increasing responsibility for his own acceptable behavior. There may be parents who will obviously have given little thought to why they do what they do, seeming rather to act on the impulse of the moment and being alternately demanding and indulgent.

A teacher who asks about home discipline needs to be able to

listen and to take what is said without bristling and without launching into a lecture on better ways of doing it. It is a good idea to remember that it was information that was asked for and that there is no use in getting excited or upset when what is recounted runs counter to one's own belief. Whatever is told is useful as information, as a help to better understanding of the youngster, and as a means in knowing how best to give school-room guidance.

7. What does the child enjoy doing with parents?

Such an inquiry may result in a story of the child's always having wanted to "help" with car washing, table setting, grass-cutting, or whatever might be going on, of "tagging along" wherever Daddy went, of family picnics and trips and fun nights ever since the child was a baby, of family emergencies with the youngster knowing about it all and doing his part, of bedtime stories and reading together, of talks about all manner of things. There may be an account of the teen-ager coming in to waken Mother and Dad with a thrilling story of the date just ended, of the boy's calling long distance because he couldn't wait to get home to tell of the team's latest triumph, or of the family's planning together for vacations and weekend trips and family celebrations.

The picture may be revealed of a family greatly enjoying each other, revelling in doing things together, and making it a point to take whatever comes as a family. Or the picture may be one of much more casual relationships, and the question may bring forth a vague sort of reply that there isn't time to do much together, that Father and Mother are busy, that the child goes with his own crowd, that mealtimes are on the irregular side except for the weekend when most meals are eaten together, that there are some vacation trips together—giving the general impression that the family enjoys each other well enough but that they take each other pretty much for granted. Or there may be little enjoyment together, or perhaps even avoidance; a picture of parents

busy with affairs outside the home and a child going his own way lonely and maybe longing for companionship; a picture hinted at both by what is said and by what isn't. In such an instance the question will probably be met with evasiveness and the subject shortly changed.

Knowing how important the feeling of family togetherness is in a child's living, whatever is revealed one way or the other will have great significance to an understanding teacher.

8. What sort of things does the child enjoy doing at home?

Some of them will be the child's play activities, some the work in which the child has a part, some the everyday routine activities.

With parents of younger children there are likely to be accounts of fun in backyard wading pools, mud-pie making, sand-box play, playhouse living, tricycle riding, and swinging, with regular visits to the park for city dwellers, feeding the ducks and pigeons, perhaps learning to swim, and going to the zoo. Mention is likely to be made of interest in washing hands, with much lathering of soap and splashing of water; of great satisfaction in the independent management of buttons or zippers; of excitement over the chance to help set the table or to roll out cookies (with tastes of the dough) or to dig in the garden.

With older children one will hear of paper-doll play, scrap-book making, jumping rope with measured chanting, playing jackstones, dressing up to "play lady," or Cowboys and Indians. Besides these there is likely to be the story of interest in learning to sew or perhaps to knit, in using the power tools for the first time with Dad, in getting started on cooking, in helping Mother serve tea to guests, or in taking the head of the table in Dad's absence, with all the attendant responsibilities. One will get a pretty good picture of the child's out-of-school play life, whether it is full and rich or drab and meager.

Parents of still older children will probably answer the question with accounts of hobbies, of participation in sports, of

social gatherings, of neighborhood projects, of money-earning enterprises, of home responsibilities willingly assumed. A question here and another there will bring mention of favorite radio programs, time spent with television, comic-book reading and other reading, and use of the record player and favorite records.

Along with the accounts of things that the child enjoys doing may be mention of a few that he does not and a glimpse of some day-by-day difficulties. Perhaps getting washed for meals is not a favorite activity, or getting to bed at the appointed time, or coming in from play when called, or performing required household chores.

Interspersed in the telling will be comments that an alert teacher will catch which will tell whether the child's enterprises are participated in with enjoyment, tolerated with forbearance, or looked upon as a nuisance to be endured. It will be pretty clear whether there is freedom to play and a place to do it or cramped quarters and limited opportunities, whether the child has a part in family work or is usually on the fringe of what goes on, whether home activities are seen by the parents as something to be enjoyed together or as something that must be done and that bring little enjoyment. In almost every interview things such as these will come up that have bearing on something else. A wise teacher listens and fits the pieces together and uses the information for better understanding of both child and parents, but comments on it only when the time seems right and *keeps it always in confidence*.

9. What kind of baby was the child?

Parents usually thoroughly enjoy telling about when the youngster sat up, when the first tooth came, when he walked, when he talked, the cute things he did as a baby. As they talk, a teacher who can listen with understanding will catch a picture of the youngster's growing, of the family living pattern at the time, of the part each of the parents took in the baby's care, of the times of anxiety and those of great enjoyment, perhaps of

relatives and their part in the living, of adjustments that had to be made with the baby's coming, of the parents' feeling about the youngster.

All such details are things that lie in each child's experience and that he brings with him to school, even though he is unaware that they are part of him and have helped to make him the child or young person that he is. A teacher does well to get as much understanding as is possible of babyhood and little childhood days; indeed, of all the days that have gone before the immediate school experience. They are all part of each youngster who comes into one's schoolroom.

10. What do the parents see as the youngster's strength? What are the things they feel glad about, the things they like about him?

One parent who had been asked to tell this said that it was a joy to have a chance to speak of the nice things about her children without being thought a bore. Another commented, "Well, to think I'm being asked to brag—here goes." It is very easy for teacher and parent alike to slip into the habit of spending so much thought on children's faults that their strength seldom comes up for mention. One does have to correct the faults, but that can be done even when sights are set on the strengths.

It can be very enlightening to a teacher to hear just what the parents look upon as strength, to understand from their own telling what characteristics give them satisfaction, and to catch a glimpse of what kind of person they see their child to be and of how well they like what they see. Often it will explain things about the child that the teacher has been at a loss to understand. The teacher's view of the youngster's strength may coincide pretty closely with the parents' or it may vary widely. Sometimes parents will mention as strengths things the teacher definitely does not look upon as so. Sometimes they will wholly overlook characteristics which to the teacher are outstanding strengths. Some may be so unaccustomed to looking for the child's strength that they will find it hard to answer the question.

Whatever the conversation may reveal, it is almost sure to give the teacher new understanding.

Mentioning these things that a teacher may want to ask about is not intended to suggest that every teacher ask every question of the parents of every child. One may not even have the opportunity to talk with the parents of every child. Even when one does, a question that fits into one interview may not fit into another. Only the teacher having the interview can know what to ask and when and how to ask it. Certainly one would never ask anything just to be asking, but only for the sake of better understanding the child and of knowing better how to help him. And parents should *never have any reason to doubt that whatever they say will be held in confidence*, never gossiped about, never even recounted as a good story.

C. Matters that Often Come up Incidentally During the Interview

Often these things are of more significance than the matter being talked about directly. It may be something that would not have occurred to the teacher to ask about, or something that would not seem wise to ask about. It may be some bit of information, or a point of view expressed, or an attitude revealed by a gesture, or some overtone or undertone of feeling that one will catch, giving color to the words being spoken. A sensitive, alert teacher becomes increasingly aware of these incidental, often intangible things. They can be an aid to understanding why the youngster behaves as he does and can often serve as a hint to the teacher, perhaps to give some extra affection, or to provide for more opportunities to talk with the youngster, or to hold a little firmer hand, or to ease off on what is expected, or to make a point of giving some special encouragement, or to bring up some subject about which the child has information.

Following are a few of the things that often come up incidentally or even casually.

1. Parents' ambitions for the child.

Maybe it is an ambition for him to go to college or perhaps to go into a given profession or business. Perhaps it is an ambition for the child's social achievement, for high grades, for public recognition, for athletic accomplishment, or for proficiency in music or art. Perhaps it is an ambition for the child, as one parent put it, "to be just whatever he is best fitted to be," with no outlining on the parents' part of what that shall be. There may be some passing word of explanation showing why the parent holds a given ambition for the youngster: "I never had the chance for college and I want him to have it"; "The business has been in the family for years and he is the one to carry it on"; "No one gets anywhere these days without college"; "A girl should marry and she must meet the right people"; "I can't imagine a child of mine not getting high grades."

Even though the teacher is likely to let the comments pass just as casually as they are spoken, they may throw light on the child's anxiety about grades, or explain his constant play for the attention of classmates, or show the reason for his dependence or adult approval, or show why there is such a pressing drive to be first in everything. Again, the parents' willingness to let the child find his own career may help better to understand his ease of mind, his interest in everything he does, and his confidence in the adults' understanding.

2. Eating and sleeping habits.

The teacher may catch and fit together such comments as: "Never did care about food"; "Never had any food trouble"; "Dashes in, gulps his food, and dashes off"; "Never can get him filled up"; "A very fussy eater even when a baby"; "Puts off bedtime to the last possible minute"; "Goes to bed and goes to

sleep"; "Takes a long time to settle down"; "A restless sleeper, cries out"; "Never any problem with sleep"; "Still takes Teddy Bear to bed"; "Woudn't go away from home without that blue blanket she has always slept with"; and so on. The tone of voice as much as the word spoken will tell the parents' feeling about the youngster's actions.

With older children there may be mention of bedtime being delayed by homework assignments, by undue interest in late television shows, or by running around with the gang much later than the parents approve. Or the story may be one of agreement on a bedtime hour that is cheerfully adhered to, of working out a time for homework that seems reasonable to the youngster and then is his responsibility to observe, or of deciding together on how to fit the things that must be done with favorite programs and then abiding by the decision.

There may be comments that tell of a mad rush in the morning to get everyone off, with the child frequently leaving for school without breakfast and the parents passing it off with a casual, "I'm never hungry in the morning either." Maybe the teacher suddenly understands that when the youngster sits around quietly for a while before getting busy he needs to do so in order to get settled down from the rush. Maybe it flashes into thought, "No breakfast, that's why he peters out before noon and can't do his arithmetic." Maybe the child that the parents "just can't get to go to bed until his favorite radio or television program is over" is the one the teacher has been wishing would get a little more pep into his work. Perhaps the nursery or kindergarten child who consistently refuses to eat turns out to be the one who "just won't eat unless I feed her with her baby spoon," and the teacher sees clearly enough that both child and parent need help in seeing the attractiveness of independence.

Comments about eating and sleeping will probably come up in connection with almost anything being discussed because they occur every day, and if there happens to be any difficulty with either one, parents are likely to have it on their minds.

3. What parents expect of the child.

A teacher is likely to pick up bits of information about what obedience is expected, whether the parents expect the child to "jump when I speak" or are satisfied if he does what is asked most of the time; about the responsibility expected in care of clothes, in care of own room, in care of pets; about household chores expected of the youngster; about living up to admonitions to "Remember your manners," "Never disgrace the family name," "Never do anything you do not want us to see."

Comments that indicate that the youngster never quite lives up to expectations may tell the teacher plainly that expectations are beyond the youngster's ability to fulfill and may hint at one reason for the tenseness evident in all of his work. Maybe there will be a mental note to say a word at some parent group meeting about what is reasonable to expect of a youngster at different ages. A complaining remark that "He never hears what I say until I yell," or "What I tell her to do just goes in one ear and out the other," may suggest to the teacher that demands, if not too hard, may be too many or too often repeated. Comments that "He does pretty well with all we ask," or "We let him set his own pace," or "We don't ask what he can't do" suggest that expectations and the youngster's ability are a pretty good fit.

4. What the parents look upon as desirable and undesirable behavior.

When parents of a child mention with pride that "He will never take anything off anybody; he'll haul off and hit them," a teacher can better understand the youngster's apparent bewilderment when that sort of behavior is questioned at school. When parents mention casually such things as telling their youngster, "Always own up to anything you do," "Stand up for yourself but don't pick a fight," "Tell the truth no matter what anyone else does," these comments give a clue about the things

for which the youngster is likely to expect approval or disapproval at school. Mention may be made that "She has always been a good girl and never talks back," and a teacher can know that that child probably looks upon "talking back" as being "naughty." Perhaps the teacher will wonder whether the child's sweet compliance with every suggestion is as willing as it has been assumed to be.

One can be sure that each child brings to school in thought the parents' idea that this behavior is right and that is wrong. A teacher does well to discover what those ideas are.

5. The religion in the home.

Some mention of this is likely to be made, especially if religion plays an important part in the family living. Mention may be made of the child's going to Sunday School, of the parents' participation in church activities, of religious observances in the home, or perhaps of differences between the parents' religious beliefs and how this has been adjusted and how it affects the child. Some parents may mention that they lack a religious belief but that they are willing for the child to subscribe to whatever seems to him right as he grows up. Others may tell of expecting the child to follow their beliefs and may speak of the disappointment it would be if he should not.

Whatever the parents may tell about the religion in the home will be of help in understanding the child, just as everything else that is told about him is a help, but it is a matter for the parents to bring up rather than the teacher. When it does come into the conversation, it is best for the teacher to be watchful to accept whatever is said without critical thought or comment.

6. What has been told about sex?

This is often mentioned with the qualifying statement, "I don't know whether I did right or not," indicating that the

parent probably would welcome an opportunity to talk more about it. The teacher may find that a group meeting on the subject would be desirable. It is helpful to have references to good magazine articles about the matter at hand for parents who want them.

The parents may speak of talking about sex in the same natural way as about anything else. Some may tell of having volunteered information when they felt the child would probably be interested and of answering any questions as they occur. A teacher can tell, by what the parents say and by how they say it, whether they answer questions freely or with embarrassment and restraint.

Some may tell of waiting for questions that do not come and of wondering why. It may be plain enough to the teacher that the parents' tension and lack of ease in speaking of the matter would not encourage a child to question, but it is best to be slow about saying so. If that is the way the parent feels, then that is the way it is; the mere saying that different feelings would encourage questioning would not bring about the change.

Some may tell of experiences that the child has had with a family of kittens arriving, or a litter of puppies. Maybe there are white rats or mice for schoolroom pets and the teacher will tell of the children's questions and comments about the babies there have been or that are expected. Parents may speak of a baby's arrival in the family—of how the child was told and of the reactions to the baby when it came.

If the child is up in the grades the matter of boy-girl interest may come up and a teacher will get an idea of how the parents feel about that. The mother of a thirteen-year-old girl casually commented in an interview with the homemaking teacher that she hoped Elsie would soon get to dating, that she didn't want her to run any risk of not getting married young. The next mother to come in for interview said that she was trying to keep her fourteen-year-old a little girl as long as possible, and that she was so glad there had been no signs of dating but lots of fun with boys and girls in a crowd. How could a teacher ever understand a youngster's behavior without knowing how the parents feel?

7. Family finances.

Maybe the teacher has wondered about Johnny's often repeated excuses that he forgot money for the trip to be taken, or that he lost the money for needed supplies, or that his mother or dad wouldn't give it to him. Some casual comment in the interview may confirm the teacher's guess that it is limited finances and not forgetfulness or lack of interest on the parents' part that leaves Johnny without money for this or that.

Perhaps it will come to light that Donald has out-of-school hours filled with a paper route and neighborhood errands, leaving little time for homework, which accounts for unprepared lessons morning after morning. Maybe this bothers the parents too, but it is the only way for him to have the clothes and do the things that the other children do. Or perhaps there is money enough but the youngster wants to be earning and the parents think that it is good experience. They may tell with pride of how he started off on money-earning projects when only seven or eight, of how "he has always hung on to his money," or of how it worries them because he spends as fast as he earns. They may speak of disappointment that an allowance, given with the idea of teaching the youngster to save, to spend, to manage accounts, and to realize the value of money, seems to do none of these things and disappears on the day it is given. There may be passing reference to the youngster's being paid for household chores, or perhaps a comment that home responsibilities are looked upon as a contribution to family living and so bring no payment, or it may become apparent that the allowance fluctuates as the youngster's behavior is "good" or "bad."

All the bits of information—on family finances, the family attitude toward money, the money a child has his hands on, the freedom to spend, the urge to save, or the demand for accounting—tell the teacher something of what the child brings in thought to the store play at school, or to the planning for buying needed supplies for the group's apple-sauce making or party, or to the

discussions on being saving of materials or thoughtful in the care of both personal property and school property. Some passing comment may throw sudden light on why it has been slow going to change Susie's ever-ready "Can't we buy it?" to willingness to get to work with her hands to help make things needed for the school play or the Christmas party. Whatever the comments, however fragmentary, they are all significant.

8. The family living pattern.

There is likely to be passing comment that will hint of the daily living schedule, perhaps rigid and exacting, perhaps hit and miss, perhaps orderly but free and easy; of family rules and regulations, few or many, made by parents and enforced as law, made but rarely enforced, made by parents and children as need arises; of family social affairs, few or many, and the children's part in them; of family living, democratic or authoritative in varying degree; of things enjoyed, music, books, sports, hobbies, etc.

A teacher does well to be slow to judge and even slower to condemn when parents drop this bit of information or that about the way the family lives that may not be along the line of the teacher's own ideas. It is so easy to think that it "ought" to be this way or that; to think how much better it would be another way than it is; to wonder why in the world anyone would do *that*. When a teacher can listen with an open, accepting, willing-to-understand thought, it will gradually become clear that the living pattern of each family is the expression of that family's thought about all sorts of things. One will be very slow, then, to say that it should not be so, or to say that this change or that should be made; instead, there will be the realization that changes come only as thinking changes.

9. The family make-up.

A teacher may or may not already know about the other children in the family: which are older or younger, whether all are at home or not, what grades they are in. Anyway, these are things

that will probably be mentioned in passing. Perhaps one parent is a step-parent. There may be step-brothers and -sisters, or half-brothers and -sisters. Perhaps some relative lives in the home. Maybe grandparents live nearby and are very important in the child's life. There may be frequent baby-sitters. Perhaps the child has a nurse. There may be household help: maid, cook, chauffeur, gardener. Insofar as any of these touch his living, a child brings them with him to school; brings in his thought or feeling what they say to him, how they feel about him, and the things that are done together. It may seem best not to ask about family make-up, but that does not prevent keeping ears open for information spoken in passing.

10. The general family feeling.

If the relationship is warm, close, and affectionate, it will show up in the way parents speak to or about each other and the child. If it is antagonistic, bickering, and at cross purposes, it will show with equal clarity. It may come out that the parents disagree on the child's bringing up and that the child plays one parent against the other. Or, even though there is difference of opinion, there may be agreement that each will abide by what the other says so that the child will not be torn hither and yon. Parents may mention a short period of jealousy when a new baby came, or perhaps tell of jealousy that has continued and what they have done about it. There may be comments hinting at parental preference for one child or another. Often a casual remark will give a clue to how the parents feel about themselves and about being parents; about whether parental responsibilities are taken seriously or lightly or with little thought at all; whether they are carried on with resentment, or with a feeling of burden and anxiety, or with great enjoyment.

The things they say may reveal something of their basic philosophy of living, of their whole outlook on life, of how they see themselves in relation to other people, and of what seems to them to be important and right. One who is alert will get a picture of the parents as people, catching a hint of special interests; of

hobbies, perhaps; of personal achievements accomplished or desired; of individual characteristics, serenity, pride, stability, insecurity, uncertainty, timidity; of a sense of humor or great seriousness; and so on.

All of the things that parents tell about in an interview are important to help the teacher understand the child—all the information they give, all they reveal of their feelings, all the thoughts they express. They all help to show how the child is being brought up, to suggest the family living which he brings to school with him, and to hint at why he does this and doesn't do that.

As a teacher goes on interviewing, all the things to tell the parents and to ask them about come with less and less effort. One becomes more and more aware, too, of the significant points that parents bring up incidentally and casually. It is usually a good idea to have the things one wants to tell or to ask clearly in mind ahead of time, even to the point of having them jotted down on a slip of paper that can be kept near at hand for a quick glance. It is much easier to think it over ahead of time than on the spur of the moment when parents are there. There is more of a chance ahead of time to take an overall look at all that might be told or asked and to select thoughtfully the things best for this particular interview. Having a few notes jotted down helps to keep on the track as the interview goes on. This does not mean that the teacher should go right down the list checking off each thing as it is told or asked. That would make a very stiff, formal, and uninteresting interview. Chances are some of the things one thought to tell or asked will never be mentioned and others will take their places. The notes are only reminders. They serve as a safeguard against forgetting things that one wanted to be sure to tell or ask. Then, when the interview is over, one can check to see which ones were spoken of and can jot down notes on the incidental things that came up. All the telling and asking and listening can be a very natural talking together, and the more natural it can be the better. It is just the simple matter of the people most concerned with the youngster telling and asking each other about him and his living.

9. Types of suggestions a teacher can give

THE SUGGESTIONS LISTED HERE ARE JUST little everyday practical things that help to smooth the way for youngsters, parents, and teachers. Some will be helpful to parents of one child, some to those of another. A teacher needs to be watchful not to swamp parents with too many at once giving, instead, only what they can use, and being content to offer the suggestion without laboring the point. She can explain what is meant, if that seems necessary, then leave it *as* a suggestion, not as something that is being urged and demanded. If it is really helpful to the parents to whom it is offered and if they are ready for it, they will pick it up and use it in their own way.

It is best to explain any suggestions with such phrases as, "because Mary is so eager to do things for herself and this will make it possible," or "because Richard is busy getting acquainted with the children and this will help." Giving reasons in terms of the well-being of the youngster—his interests, his characteristics, his growth and development—makes them have specific meaning.

It may be noticed that the suggestions offered here are so worded as to leave the *how* of carrying them out to the parents. A teacher does well to stay away from prescribing *how* a thing

shall be done, for the natural way for another to do it may be different; there never is just one right way. It seems better to suggest the idea and the reason, with whatever explanatory facts are needed, and then let it unfold in the parents' thought to find its expression in each one's individual way.

In reading the suggestions, some may feel that the situations they are intended to help are very commonplace and that the suggestions given do not dig very deeply into "problems." That is true. The situations are ones that any teacher might meet anywhere. They are commonplace in that they are things that are just an ordinary part of a youngster's growing up, things that parents are always meeting, and things that teachers are always giving help about. The suggestions purposely do not dig into "problems." Often there will be no special "problem" involved in the situation the parents are meeting. It is just a little bump in the road, or a little rough spot, or a question about which turn to take. Often, if there is a "problem," or the teacher suspects that there may be one, the time may not seem propitious for going into it. Maybe the teacher does not feel prepared to do so. Maybe the parent is not ready for it and a simple suggestion will suffice for the time. The suggestion may serve as the first step, which will lead into a more thorough consideration of the situation later. Anyway, there are all sorts of little helpful suggestions about everyday things that teachers can give in the course of an interview, and it is some of these that are mentioned here. For convenience of use the suggestions are grouped, though those in one group often apply equally well in another.

A. If the Child is Just Starting to School

It is assumed that this will be nursery school or kindergarten, though, in some schools, a child will start in the first grade or a pre-primary group. Whichever way it is, the just-starting situations are much the same.

1. It is very common for a child to take on new independence after he feels at home in school.

Parents often mention there being such a change in the child after he starts to school that he does not seem like the same child. Maybe he is loud-voiced or bossy, perhaps even trying out a bit of defiance to see how it works, when before he was sweetly quiet and compliant. The teacher may call attention to the fact that now he is on his own, away from home for the first time, seeing other children who are behaving in ways new to him; so he is trying out some different kinds of behavior himself. Maybe there will be a suggestion that the parents should give more chance than ever for him to do things for himself; perhaps letting him help Mother or Dad more than usual, letting him feel big and important. Parents often need reassurance that even though they "have lost their baby," watching the growing in little-boy and little-girl days can be very interesting, too. The defiance, refusing to do what is asked, not coming when called, appearing not to hear what is said, can often be handled by avoiding making direct demands for the time being, being sure that there are not an overabundance of demands, being sure one's own tone does not sound bossy to the youngster.

2. Don't be surprised if the youngster does not tell much about what happens at school.

When parents complain, as they often do, that their inquiry, "What did you do today?" brings the laconic answer, "Played" or "Nothing," a teacher may want to suggest their coming to visit to see what goes on. Mention may be made that the youngster is so busy with so many new experiences that he does not yet have them sorted out well enough to put his thought about them into words. Then, too, little children live in the moment and they do not refer much to past events, so when the youngster comes

home he gets busy with things there, rather than thinking about what went on at school. Parents just need to be more or less content with whatever fragmentary comments are dropped, not pushing the youngster with questions. Some teachers make a point of sending home a hectographed sheet of notes about once a week at first, telling all the parents about songs that were sung, about interesting bits of play in the housekeeping corner, about picture-books the children have enjoyed, and about bits of responsibility the children have taken in care of the fish, cleaning up spilled water, and so on. That lets parents know what goes on even when the youngster doesn't tell.

3. When the children bring their paintings home it seems best to let them tell whatever they want to about them without asking them to name what they have made.

Parents often wonder why they never can get their child to tell what he painted or why he always says "Nothing" when they ask what it is. A teacher can explain that usually, with little children, it really *is* nothing. They are just painting for the fun of painting, not for the sake of making any particular thing. It is only later that they begin to name things and later on that they decide ahead of time what they are going to make. When they do begin to name what they have painted, a request to "Tell me about it" is better than the question, "What is it?" They expect one to know. A teacher may mention that the reply to "Tell me about it" may be a description or maybe only the name, and that it is best not to press beyond what the child is ready to tell lest it make him feel that he must "make something" to please the grown-up. Then much of the spontaneity and fun of the doing is lost. A word may be said, too, about taking paintings seriously and not laughing at them, even though to the adult they bear no remote resemblance to what they are said to be. Sometimes instead of having little to say about his paintings a youngster will be eager to describe or explain them in great detail. When he really wants to talk about them, he should have an attentive ear.

4. The children are not given models for their painting or drawing because in these first experiences it is their own free use of materials and ideas that seems most important.

A teacher who feels this way about it can call attention to how different all the children's paintings and drawings are because they are free to draw as they feel and see. Being told by the teacher how to make something would mean that they would be trying to do what she wanted and to make things her way. Pretty soon they would just wait to be told and would never go ahead on their own. So, instead of showing them how *she* would draw a house or a man, she lets each do it in his own way.

Parents often wonder how children are ever going to draw a man that looks like a man unless someone shows them. It can be explained that the concern is not with whether it looks like a man to the grown-up, but with the child's feeling free in using the materials, in being ready and at ease in tackling anything that comes to mind, in putting ideas together in different ways. A child then will draw a thing the way it looks to him, not the way some adult thinks it ought to look. So, a teacher may want to suggest that parents might find it interesting to see how the youngster's drawings vary, how the man or the house or cow changes in detail; to see what different bits from the youngster's experiences get put into the picture; to see how drawings become more and more realistic. Later on there will be time enough for a child to learn the skills of drawing and painting.

5. Boys have fun with the dolls just as the girls do, and they like to play in the housekeeping corner, too.

Sometimes parents, particularly fathers, are distressed that their boy's doll play may be evidence of sissiness. It sometimes relieves them to know that there is little difference at this age in what boys and girls like to play unless the grown-ups make a point of it. Both boys and girls carry out in their play the things they see going on around them, and they both see babies and children

146 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

being taken care of and housekeeping doings going on. It is natural for both to play at getting dinner and putting the baby to bed and sweeping the floor. In the same way girls play with trains and dress up in cowboy boots and tear across the room screeching like a fire-engine. Parents can feel comfortable about letting the boy have his doll, knowing that in a little while it will have served its purpose and be laid aside for he-boy toys.

6. It is a good idea in teaching the children manners not to tell them too often to say this or say that, but to let them find their own words.

Parents are usually interested in hearing what is done at school to help the children to greet a visitor easily, to respond easily and naturally when someone talks to them, to be thoughtful about saying "thank you" and "excuse me." These are things most parents are always working at and they are glad to have school lend a hand. The teacher may mention being watchful not to tell the youngster to say this or that, because what is said means much more if it comes spontaneously than if it is parrot-like repetition. There may be an account of a time such as any teacher can tell about; for example, when teacher and children talked together about how nice the custodian had been to mend the tricycles and decided to go and thank him. Then when they got there no one had a word to say; the teacher said the "thank you," while the children gave only shy smiles to tell how they felt. The teacher may explain that constantly telling a child to say a particular thing gets him into the habit of repeating empty words, with none of the feeling that the words might express. One does want children to learn manners, but one also wants the manners to be sincere and genuine, not merely an empty shell.

7. Each child has his own rate of speed, and it is best not to hurry him beyond what he can do comfortably.

Often parents of a slow-moving child need encouragement to let him take his time. A teacher may tell how, at school, nothing is said when he stands around and watches the others a while

before he gets busy, or how he is chosen to be in the first group to wash up for lunch so that he will not have to be hurried, or how plenty of time is allowed for him to get wraps on. It is just that all children are geared differently and it can make a child tense to be urged to hurry with everything he does. It is better just to take him as he is and to allow time accordingly. Often that is hard for both parents and teachers, and each has to encourage the other.

8. It is hard on a child to be compared with other children.

A parent who urges a three-year-old to "Go on and try the slide. See, the others can do it," or the one who says, "Why can't you be as polite as Mary is?" may not even realize that he is comparing the youngster unfavorably with the others. And the one who says, "I am so glad you didn't spill your milk like Teddy," may not realize that by that comparison the youngster is beginning to learn to feel a bit superior and self-righteous.

A teacher may want to mention, to the parent of the three-year-old hesitating at the slide, that the child does go ahead with assurance when it comes to hand-washing time. And, to the parent of the one whose manners are under question, that she usually is one of the first on hand to "help" when anything needs doing in the kindergarten. And, to the one whose youngster managed his milk without spilling, one may point out that it makes for better relationships of one child with another when he finds satisfaction in his own accomplishment without being made to feel superior to others. As a matter of fact, it is hard to make comparisons among children because they are so different. One excels in one thing, another in something else. It is hard on a child to have to try to be like someone else. It is hard, too, to have to set an example for others. Both things make for strain and anxiety.

Often a teacher can suggest that parents look for the things their youngster does well, for the things he does today that he didn't do yesterday, for the things he does with more ease day by day, and for the cute little flourishes he puts on things as he

gets to feeling sure of how to do them. Such suggestions frequently help parents to enjoy the child more, because when they are always thinking about how he compares with others, it is a strain on them as well as on him.

Sometimes teachers, too, need to be reminded how hard it is on a child to be compared with others, to have his work singled out as not so good as another's, to have it pointed out how very helpful another child is with the implication that *he* is *not* so helpful, to have the group led to decide that he has not been a good group member. It is true that sometimes the children do let a child know in very plain terms that they do not like what he does. That is very different, however, from having the teacher say to the children, "Do you think he has been a good group member?" and to have them chorus, "No-o-o" with all eyes accusingly turned upon him. That is hard to take and can be a soul-searing experience. A little private talk with the teacher probably would be a better idea.

9. It helps a child in feeling secure and comfortable at school to know that his parents will come for him when they say they will.

This is something a teacher of little children often needs to mention to parents. Sometimes it does not occur to them that a half-hour's delay may keep the youngster hovering anxiously near the door, fearful that he has been forgotten; or that the next day there will be worried questions, "Is my Mommy coming?" "When will my Daddy come?" showing the youngster's anxiety that the delay may happen again. It is often hard for adults to realize how long a few minutes seem to a little child or how much his security depends on seeing Mother or Daddy (or whoever calls for him) appear at the appointed time.

The teacher may want to mention that the child gauges the time of their coming by the order of events, after lunchtime is nap-time, and after nap-time is milk-time, and then it is time for someone to come. If they do not then he is at loose ends. When one knows that there is going to be a delay, the youngster can be

told what to expect: after nap-time will be milk-time (or whatever the schedule is), then there will be time to play a little while, and then Mother or Daddy will come.

10. It is best not to push a child into reading.

This, too, is something a teacher often needs to mention, especially along in the kindergarten year when children are likely to be asking what this word or that one says, or commenting that they know whose name that is, or picking up a book and "reading" a familiar story. This is when parents often want to begin to teach the child at home, or when they urge upon the teacher that the child really should be getting at his reading. These things are important signs but they do not mean that the child is ready to learn the skills of reading; only that he is becoming aware that words "say things" as one child put it; and that he is beginning to know a few familiar words, such as his own names and other children's names; and that he is looking upon reading as something very nice to do.

The teacher may want to tell of all the opportunities being given at school for the children to see that words do have meaning—the names on lockers, the labels on boxes of supplies which maybe the children have seen made and have helped to put on, the signs designating the places for hanging the workbench tools, "hammer here," etc. Mention may be made of the provisions for enjoying books, such as the library table with its picture books and story books, the story-reading time with the teacher, and the story-telling times. It may be pointed out that all these things are forerunners of reading and that a child is likely to read with more understanding and more ease when he is not pushed but is allowed to sort of "burst into it" when he is ready, which is the way one mother described what happened with her youngster.

The teacher may want to speak of how research studies in child development show great differences in the time at which children's eyes develop so that they are able to see the differences

150 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

among words, and it is best not to try to hurry them. There are many things involved in reading: seeing the words, distinguishing the different ones, taking in a group at a glance, knowing what they say, keeping eyes on the line, moving on to the next line. It can be discouraging to a child to get at it too soon.

It can be suggested that the parents' reading to the child is one of the most important ways in which they can help the child to be ready for reading. It helps to make reading seem very attractive, helps to make it clear that you find out interesting things when you read, and helps to set forth the idea that words do indeed "say things." It helps, too, to give him books that he can enjoy alone, to tell him the labels on cans and boxes, to read the television titles for him. When he asks about a word, it is best just to tell it, *not* to spell it out. That comes much later in school.

11. A child needs the self-respect that comes from feeling helpful and useful.

It does take time to let a child "help" and there is no doubt that one can get the thing done faster without the help. But the other side of the picture shows the youngster's feeling of being needed, of being wanted around, of being useful, and how a few words of appreciation do make eyes shine and face glow! Even a very little child needs self-respect and being useful helps to give it. A teacher may want to speak of the eagerness of the youngster at school to help set the tables, feed the pets, put away clay, mix paints, anything just to help. Looked upon as the first step in willingly taking responsibility, this "helping" becomes something well worth nourishing and cherishing, and the companionship in the doing is by no means to be passed over lightly.

12. A child gets a great deal out of having a chance to work out his own relationships with other children so far as he can.

A teacher often makes a comment such as the above in the course of an interview when parents have told of their so-far

fruitless struggle to get their youngster to share his playthings willingly or of the yelling and fussing that flares up in the backyard play, or of their despair in ever getting him to fight his own battles. It can be pointed out that little children experiment with behavior just as they do with their playthings, that they have to more or less find out for themselves what works, what they can get away with and what they can't. Of course, the grown-up has to tell them things to do and not to do, but they have to get the feel of it themselves; otherwise it is merely doing what they are told. Thus a child often gives up a toy because he is told to without its really being a matter of sharing at all, but only doing what someone said he must. True, a child needs to learn to share and the grown-up is the one to help him, but it is better for him to get the feeling of what he is doing instead of just going through the motions.

Perhaps it will be suggested that parents keep hands off when the child is in trouble with another until they see if he can manage things himself. He may not do it just the way the grown-up would like, but it may be a very natural three- or four- or five-year-old way, and it may be obvious that it has given the child a feeling that he has the situation in hand. That is important and, so long as no one is in any danger, it seems good to let him take care of it.

13. A rich background of experience gives a child things to talk about at school and helps to make stories and things he hears about more meaningful to him.

Often it does not occur to parents how very useful the things they do with their children are, such as trips to the zoo, or to the airport, or to Daddy's office, or to the farm, or almost anywhere. It all serves to broaden experience. So does the opportunity to have a hand in buying groceries, in taking the car to be serviced, in mailing a package, in getting new clothes, or in buying a gift for someone special. It gives many things to tell about at school, and when the time comes for reading, it furnishes a rich background for understanding the meaning of

152 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

whatever is being read. The word "zoo" comes up in the reading and the child who has been to the zoo knows what that word means in terms of the bears, monkeys, and so on that were seen. The reading has meaning far different to that child than to the one who knows what one sees at the zoo only vaguely or not at all. The teacher may want to suggest, too, how important it is to talk with the youngster about his experiences, to listen attentively to what he wants to say without interrupting him or hurrying him, and to answer his questions in the detail that he wants. It all helps him in talking freely at school.

14. One can do a great deal to encourage good speech without saying much about it.

It can be mentioned that it usually is best not to make a child self-conscious about his speech by too many direct comments or corrections or by laughing at mistakes. It helps to speak clearly when talking to the youngster, to pronounce words he asks about very distinctly and make certain that he gets them correctly, to tell him what the word is that he may have mispronounced or have had only half right. Little children love words, and one can greatly increase a child's vocabulary by giving a variety of new words for everyday things. One four-year-old had great fun using the words "exit" and "entrance" instead of just plain "door." Another was thrilled with "eating utensils," another with "quadruped."

15. It is a great help toward a child's independence to have rubbers and galoshes big enough, clothes that he can manage, and all garments plainly labeled.

If these things are called to the parents' attention as being very important to a child's independence, they are usually glad enough to do them. A teacher may want to speak especially of having buttonholes and buttons that fit each other and that the youngster can manage easily. Front buttons are easier than back ones. If all a child's clothing labels are exactly the same, he can quickly

learn to recognize his own. A snap clothes-pin with the child's name on it for clipping rubbers together and another for mittens is a big help.

B. If the Child Is in the Primary Grades

The grades 1 to 4 are spoken of here as primary grades, and the children are assumed to be about six to nine years old. Some children in the first grade will have been to kindergarten, some to nursery school as well; for others, first grade will be their first school experience. If it is, many of the suggestions grouped under Section A will be useful here, too.

1. Although reading, writing, and arithmetic are important, so are many other things, such as ability to take responsibility, dependability, initiative, and resourcefulness.

A teacher may want to speak of this in an early interview so that both teacher and parents will think of school achievement in these broad terms instead of merely in terms of books read, numbers learned, or words written. Parents are usually very glad to find that a teacher thinks of the help given on individual character development as part of the school's business along with book learning. A teacher may speak of the day's activities as being on the informal side, so that the children have opportunity to learn such things as working quietly when others are talking, assuming responsibility for putting things away, helping in house-keeping duties, and the like. It may be suggested that, when the parents ask about what goes on at school, they might ask about these things, too, and that by commenting on them they show that they consider them an important part of schoolwork.

2. If your child is being taught reading, arithmetic, or writing differently than you were taught, it will save confusion not to make him feel that the way he is being taught is wrong.

Now and then parents speak to the teacher of how differently their child is being taught than they were, but often they do not

mention the matter openly. Something the child says may let the teacher know that the parents have been wondering what is going on. The comments that are repeated may show that they do not wholly approve of what is being done. It is often a good idea for the teacher to bring up the subject and to explain how things are being done and why. One can mention hoping that the parents will feel free to ask about anything that they find is being done differently than they had thought it would be, or about anything that they wonder about. As conversation goes on they may speak their disapproval—perhaps mildly or perhaps vigorously—and, of course, they have a right to their opinion. A teacher's manner of speaking in making explanations will show plainly enough her respect for that right. Even so, she may want to comment that, although the parents may not wholly approve of the way things are being taught, it will save confusion for the child if they are careful not to make him feel that it is wrong. It is important for him to feel secure and comfortable about his school and he cannot if he thinks his parents do not approve of it. The teacher may want to speak of willingness to tell them in detail how things are done, so that if they want to help the child at home it will be in the same way that he is being taught at school.

3. Children of this age like to assume responsibility but often do not like to have it thrust upon them.

There is a great difference between giving a child responsibility and letting him assume it.

Parents often complain that their child fusses about the responsibilities that they assign to him, even though when he was smaller he always wanted to help. It can be suggested that as children get more independent they like to take on the responsibility voluntarily, rather than having it handed out to them by the parents. The teacher may mention that at school the group talks over the things that need to be done and then different ones choose the things they want to do. After all, it may be pointed

out, it is the *willingness* to take the responsibility that seems important. It does not matter so much what a child is responsible about so long as he is willing to *be* responsible. This brings up the point of whether a child can always have his choice or whether he should be held responsible for some things whether he wants to or not. The teacher will probably agree that a child does need to learn to take responsibility even when it is distasteful, but she may suggest that even then the *willingness* to do it is something to be thought about and that resistance to responsibility is something to be avoided. It might be mentioned, too, that at school things go better if the children rotate responsibilities, not being responsible for any one thing very long at a time.

4. There are many things parents can do at home to help along a child's understanding of numbers.

Parents are usually very glad for suggestions of specific things they can do to help in a child's school learning. A teacher may mention playing simple games calling for recognition of figures, counting, or keeping simple score; such as ring toss, parchesi, lotto, dominoes, or maybe canasta. It may be suggested that having a hand in making out the grocery list or the laundry list gives practical meaning to numbers. Doing errands at the store and bringing back change is opportunity for finding out about money values.

Mention may be made, too, that natural everyday experiences in using measuring cups or spoons, or in telling time, or using a ruler, all help the youngster in his schoolwork.

5. Providing a child with a good children's magazine encourages reading for pleasure.

It sometimes does not occur to parents to get a primary child his own magazine though they are perfectly willing to do it when they think about it. Having his own magazine suggests

156 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

reading for pleasure. It is getting a good habit under way for a child to use some of his time reading just for fun.

A teacher can be ready with names of magazines suitable for the given child, perhaps having sample copies so that parents can make their own selection. A word might be said about reading the magazine *with* the youngster and reading *to* him as well as letting him read it by himself if he can, so that he will know about all the enjoyable things that are in it and so that they can be talked over together.

6. Friends among children of his own age become increasingly important to a child during these years.

A teacher may want to mention the friendships that the child is making at school, perhaps speaking of how little groups form and change and of how more and more the youngster wants to be one of a group. Mention may be made of some of the things children learn from being in a group and having friends; for example, that sometimes you have to give up your own ideas, that sometimes you stick to your own ideas and the other fellow gives in, that it gives a nice feeling to do something a friend wants, that there is fun to be had together that cannot be had alone, and so on. There may be comment on how much it means to a child to have his parents accept his friends, to be free to bring them home to play, to have them treated courteously when they come. Many parents make a great point of being nice to their children's friends and often they appreciate knowing that the teacher notices it and agrees that it is important.

7. When a child argues about something it is often the trying out of ideas and independence.

Parents will frequently mention the child's arguing, saying that everything they ask of him seems to bring it forth no matter how reasonable the request. Sometimes it takes on a different look when one comments that at these ages it often is a sort of

sharpening of wits, a testing out of independence, a lot of talk which is mostly for the sake of talking. The teacher may suggest that reducing the number of direct demands often helps. It also helps to give the youngster a chance to express his opinion about things frequently, making a point to talk with him companionably about many things so that he does not need to argue in order to get up a conversation.

8. A child needs to feel that he is a nice child; a good boy.

A teacher may want to mention to parents that what one says to a child about himself has much to do with the kind of picture he has of himself and with the way he feels about himself, and that this has a great deal to do with the way he behaves. Often parents get so anxious about teaching the youngster to behave and correcting his faults that they slip up on mentioning the things about him that are very nice, which may give him the idea that he doesn't amount to much. A child needs to know his assets as well as his liabilities if he is to have a good mental picture of himself.

9. One can tell a great deal about a child's readiness for writing and spelling by his questions and comments.

A teacher may need to mention to parents that it does not pay to push and hurry a child, since he learns faster and more easily when he is ready. Writing takes eye-hand coordinations that cannot be hurried. Spelling takes recognition of letters and remembrance of the order in which they come. That cannot be hurried much either. Often parents will mention some of the signs of readiness that their youngster shows, his comments about this letter or that, his asking how to write a given word, his inquiry about how to spell so and so. The teacher may suggest that he be shown or told what he asks for with no pushing beyond that. If manuscript instead of cursive writing is taught at first, the teacher may explain why and ask that this be followed

at home, too, to avoid confusion, assuring the parents that cursive will be taught later on. There are likely to be parents who are not familiar with manuscript writing and who will be interested in knowing about it and why it seems better for the children to begin with it.

As writing becomes easier, it may be suggested that the youngster can get good practice at home by having a chance to write easy thank-you notes, gift enclosures, invitations, grocery lists, labels for collections, and so on. This gives a good reason for knowing how to spell the words. If phonics are used as an aid to spelling or word recognition, parents are likely to be interested in hearing about it.

10. A child gets along best when he is allowed to "be his age" without being pushed to grow up fast.

Parents often greatly appreciate a teacher's encouraging them to let their youngster take his own time growing without being pushed to grow up faster. The teacher may have opportunity to tell how richness of experience gives a child many things to think and talk about, and things to write about when creative writing days come. It also furnishes all sorts of ideas for play and art work and creative music and story-telling. A teacher can mention how interesting each stage of development can be without need for rushing on to the next, and how hard it is for a child to try to be a bigger boy (or girl) than he (or she) is ready to be. Parents, in their ambition for the child to get ahead and to do well, often unwittingly keep him from fully enjoying the experiences he is having. A teacher does well to be watchful, too, to let the children savor their experiences to the full and not to push as if in fear of not getting through with something that must be done. A teacher who can be content to let a child do what he is ready to do and get the full good out of what he does can be a big help to parents in seeing the wisdom of biding their time while growing goes on.

11. A child needs to have limits set and children want them, even though they argue against them.

Very often it is hard for parents to believe that children really do want limits set for them, because they make such a fuss about being limited. Yet, as teachers and parents compare notes, both will be able to tell about children who were obviously relieved to have it decided definitely that one thing may not be done or that another must; about children at loose ends and unhappy because they were given more responsibility for their own behavior than they were ready to take; or about children who set limits for themselves through rules and regulations in their play. The teacher may want to speak of rules and regulations being useful as guide-posts to desirable behavior, so long as the child is not hedged about with so many restrictions and demands that he has no chance for initiative and thinking for himself. Perhaps parents will tell of family conferences where rules are decided upon together.

Parents are often glad to talk with the teacher about this matter of limits because it may seem hard to them to hit a balance between letting a child use his own judgment and deciding things for him. A teacher can point out that children of this age are unable to foresee the consequences of things they might want to do and that the adult with more experience must protect them from their own mistakes. For example, the nine-year-old girl may see no reason why she should not come home alone after dark from a friend's home, but the parent does see why and therefore must set the limit of the time she may stay. The teacher may speak of limits that are set at school and of talking with the children about the necessity for them.

12. Even though one wants a child to learn to stick to what he starts, it is better during these years not to insist upon it always.

The teacher may speak of how children at these ages are still exploring all sorts of interests; how they go a little way with them, then get intrigued with something else.

A child often wants to start something that he is not yet really able to do, and if he is forced to finish it, it discourages him so that he may not want to even try it again. That is sometimes true of piano lessons, collections, carpentry, and handicrafts of one sort or another.

The boy may start off with big ideas of the boat he is going to make and may start working on it; then, first thing one knows, the thing has petered out because there was not yet the know-how or skill to carry out the ideas. Or the girl may get all excited about a piece of bead work or the making of some shell jewelry and things may get off to a good start. Then it gets tedious and tiresome, interest lags, and the end looks a long way off. Letting the youngster lay off for a while may mean that he will come back to the same thing or something similar with renewed interest after he has grown a bit. With newly developed ability, chances are he will make a go of it this time.

Parents often question whether a child should not learn to finish what he begins, and no one would deny that it is a good characteristic to have. The point is that one would not want to lose the interest in exploring all sorts of possibilities in these early years through insistence that each one undertaken be pursued to the end. A child would soon become cautious about starting anything, lest he be stuck with it. There are plenty of things for them to finish without having to do every single one.

13. One may as well accept the fact that, in the latter part of the primary grades, what the gang thinks about some things becomes more important to the child than what either parents or teacher think.

It is hard for parents to have their boy insist upon going around with shirt-tail out, one pants-leg rolled up, and cap on the back of his head; or to have the girl insist upon her beautiful hair being cut short, plead for a permanent, use language never before permitted, or disregard all rules about coming straight home from school; or to be told off when some request is made within the hearing of the gang. It is hard for a teacher to have

a youngster who is perfectly capable of doing good work suddenly slump because the gang looks with favor on achievements other than those shown by high grades, or to have a usually sweet cooperative youngster take on an air of indifference to any suggestion or even show near-defiance when asked to do some schoolroom chore.

A teacher may need to remind both herself and the parents that this deference to the gang is often a necessary step in a child's taking his place among other children. It is encouraging to parents to have a teacher understand and point out that, for the time being, getting established with the group probably better be looked upon as just as important as getting top grades. She can mention, too, that perhaps both teacher and parents better overlook a bit of disregard of their requests and wishes for the moment and understand how the child is being pressured by conflicting loyalties.

14. It encourages a child to enter into school activities with interest when parents look upon them all as being important.

When parents look upon some of the school activities as "regular schoolwork" and others as "frills" or "extras," it is often because they have not been told or have not observed how all the many activities are geared together to make a rich, balanced program. The teacher may want to mention how spelling and writing become necessary for carrying on some of the dramatics; how delving into the sciences gives a wealth of things to talk and read and write about; how a trip calls for planning together, opens up new interests, adds to the general fund of knowledge, and ties in with reading, writing, spelling, and language.

The teacher may speak of all the activities being looked upon as important in different ways, and of how the learning that comes out of the daily living together in school is as important as, or maybe more important than, anything else. There may be comment about how the parents' interest in helping the youngster, with suggestions on the skit for the play or on the costumes

or on the making of the stage properties, set the child to work with a confidence that inspired the other children. There may be occasion to speak of how letting the child bring the parents' shell collection to school stimulated the youngster to begin a search for more information on shells and got the group interested, too. Parents often do not realize how some seemingly little bit of interest and encouragement given at home helps along the child's work at school.

C. If the Child Is in the Elementary Grades

These children are usually from nine through twelve years old, and in grades four through eight, though always there will be wide variations in any one grade. In any group there will be those whose parents are still as interested in all the school doings as they were through the primary grades. There will be those whose parents by now pretty much leave school doings to the school to look after, so long as things go all right. There will be children who tell all about their school affairs at home and those who tend more and more to keep school affairs to themselves. There will be those who like to have their parents come to school and those who fear that the parents will be thought queer if they come on other than special occasions. Whatever the situation, a child's home life and his school life are interwoven in his thought, and there are still many things for teacher and parents to talk together about and many pointers they can give each other.

1. Children usually do better homework if there is a reasonable amount of time allotted for it at a regular time.

It is assumed that the amount of homework will be reasonable in the first place; that it will be something both needed and possible for the child to do. A teacher does well to remember that a child has a great amount of home living and neighborhood living that he must do, and that he must have time to do it, and that plenty of sleep is necessary if he is to be fresh for school.

It would seem that parents of an elementary school child would be justified in questioning homework that takes more than forty-five minutes, or, at the most, an hour a day of good steady work. With all of the above cared for, a teacher may sometimes suggest that often the difficulty in getting homework done is because it is done hit-or-miss, and that having a regular time for it is a good idea. It might be mentioned that here is a good opportunity for the youngster to have a say-so in planning when the time shall be. It can be suggested, too, that it helps if the forty-five minutes or hour decided upon can be kept free of interruptions: free from requests that the youngster stop to do this errand or that, free from bothering by younger children, free from distracting radio or television programs and the like. This is not to suggest that the teacher ask the parent to stop the household while homework is done, but only that it will probably be done better if a regular time is set aside for it and unnecessary distractions avoided.

2. A child of these ages needs the chance to be still a little child part of the time and grown-up part of the time.

This veering from being a little boy or girl one minute to being a very grown-up young person the next frequently starts parents to wondering how in the world to treat the youngster. A teacher can give some very welcome reassurance with an understanding comment that the youngster needs plenty of chance to act both ways. To parents who are worried that the youngster is not grown-up enough and who want to hurry the process, it is encouraging to have the teacher tell of schoolroom instances: where the child has taken initiative in planning some trip and has shown ability to see what was needed and to work out details; where he has come up with a constructive suggestion that settled a group argument; or where he has stood up for his own rights with courage and poise and without angry words. Mention may be made that it is natural for home to be the place where the youngster can let down and not be so grown-up, and

164 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

that being expected to be grown-up all the time can be quite a strain. The teacher might suggest that there may be some of these same evidences of growing up at home, too, mixed in with younger-child behavior.

To parents who do not quite realize that the youngster is ready for growing up, the teacher may speak of the opportunities being given the child at school—to come forth with ideas of things for the group to do, to participate in group planning, to help decide the best way to handle some schoolroom difficulty—all of them opportunities to move along in independence, in relying on his own ideas, and in building confidence that he can see what to do in the situations that come up. It may be suggested that perhaps the child is growing up faster than the parents have thought, and that maybe he could have more opportunity to show what he can do.

3. One needs to be patient and understanding with a child who is still so concerned with making friends and standing well with "the crowd" that admonitions of both parents and teacher go by the board and his behavior is open to question.

A teacher will often have occasion to point out that many of the bits of behavior that are not quite what one hopes for are really the youngster's means of showing the gang that he is neither a "sissy," "mama's boy," "teacher's pet," or a "goody-goody." It may be mentioned that here is where group organizations, such as clubs, scout troops, Brownies, and the like, help to save the day with their emphasis on high standards of work and play and the opportunity they offer to be one of a crowd. It may be suggested that a youngster is quite likely, so far as the gang is concerned, to keep under cover the fact that he wipes dishes, baby-sits, makes his bed, helps clean up the bathroom, and so on, and that he will appreciate parents not mentioning such things in public. A teacher often can speak of the standing and prestige that it gives a youngster to have a chance to entertain his gang (or her crowd) at home. When the things to be done and the eats to be served are those of the youngster's own choice,

they are sure to pass muster with the other boys and girls. With mind at rest about his place in the crowd, with reasonable assurance that he will not be embarrassed before them, with certainty of their being treated well at home, a youngster can turn his attention to studying.

4. It is often wise to ease up on demands whenever possible.

A teacher can frequently drop a word that eases the way for a youngster who feels that parents are "picking on him." The parents' very anxiety to have the child behave himself and be liked by others often results in more demands than the youngster can take to "stand up straight," "don't yell," "stop using such language," "throw away that gum," "don't talk with your mouth full," "set that chair on its legs," "don't slam that door again," and the like. A teacher needs to be on the lookout, too, not to add to the load with insistence to "get down to work," "put your feet on the floor," "stop chewing your pencil," "get that desk in order," "don't mumble your words," and so on. It is readily understandable that such demands have a deflating effect, just when a youngster wants to feel grown-up but is none too sure of himself. A teacher can mention being watchful at school to reduce demands and to word requests so that they do not sound demanding.

5. A child can do with a great amount of praise and appreciation.

A teacher may mention how the child warmed up to some well-deserved, honest praise of a piece of work successfully finished, or of good hard effort put forth on some project, or of the way some responsibility was assumed and carried out. Comment may be made about the youngster's evident happiness at the teacher's spoken appreciation of some thoughtful act, or of some beautiful thought expressed in art, writing, or music. Often there will be occasion to tell the parents of the child's pleased comment at school about praise they have given or appreciation they have spoken at home. A teacher can often emphasize how

166 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

honest praise and genuine appreciation encourages a child, builds up his self-respect, gives him a sense of his own worth, adds to his confidence, and gives him a feeling of achievement. She may speak of the importance of praise being honestly spoken and of appreciation being genuinely felt. Children know when praise has been earned, and it has little meaning unless there is the inner consciousness of its being well deserved. They know, too, when the appreciation spoken is sincere, and if it is not sincere it is of little value.

6. The child may enjoy carrying on many of the school activities outside of school.

A teacher can point out that when a child really enjoys his schoolwork he does like to continue with it, though in a different way, outside of school, and that parents can help schoolwork immeasurably by providing him the opportunities to do this. The teacher may suggest a card at the public library, with frequent trips to get books; or perhaps of a Saturday class in painting, making sure that it is free and enjoyable; or a trip to collect shells, or stones, or seed pods; or a chance to plant a garden; or a visit to the library for the story-telling hour or to browse among the books. The teacher may want to say a warning word about letting the activity, whatever it is, be free and spontaneous; not a "lesson" that must be done. Parents will often speak about music lessons that get off to a promising start only to bog down later. The teacher may want to suggest that music should be enjoyable, and if it isn't maybe something needs changing. Perhaps the youngster is being pushed too fast, or going beyond his depth, or being held to whatever it is too insistently. Maybe he was not interested in the first place. Sometimes if a thing is dropped for a time there is a renewed enthusiasm later on.

7. A child really needs some free time to do with as he pleases.

A teacher will sometimes want to mention this need of children for time that is not filled with things that must be done. This is

even more important if the school is on the formal side, with a rather fixed program, than it is when the children can move about freely and have a good deal of leeway in managing their work; when the day's activities do not have to be done on the split second. There may be a child whose schoolwork the teacher feels is suffering because time is so full that there is never a moment to let down and relax, what with music lessons and the necessary practice, dancing class, Cub-Scouts or Brownies, Boys' or Girls' Club, and Junior Choir at church. She may want to suggest that a little easing up might give the child more time in which to have experience in choosing what to do, or in which to explore new interests or enjoy old ones more deeply. If children are to learn to choose their own activities wisely and to use time to good purpose voluntarily, they need to have some time to use. Parents sometimes complain that the child never knows what to do with himself when they go on a trip, or when they spend a day with relatives, or when his regular groups are not meeting for some reason. Sometimes part of the reason is that time has always been planned so full for him that there has been little chance for him to learn how to plan for himself. The teacher may mention trying to arrange the schedule at school so that there is some free time for browsing among books, for playing records, or for just thinking.

8. Do not feel that the child's frequently leaving one interest for another necessarily means lack of concentration or slipshod habits.

This was mentioned with reference to the child in primary grades. (See p. 159.) It probably will still concern the parents when the child gets to the elementary grades. When he enthusiastically starts a collection, carries it on with great interest, and then drops it for another, it worries parents who want him to stick to things and finish what he starts, or it annoys those who do not like so much stuff around. The teacher may comment that at these ages, as in the years before, children are exploring; that they may not even yet have the skill necessary for going farther

than they have with some particular interest; that the interest may have served its purpose by the time they drop it. It may be pointed out that having a place to keep collections, or being provided the paraphernalia for carrying on the interest, encourages going on with it. Children often drop a project because they do not know how to go on. Sometimes a teacher can suggest a pamphlet or magazine that would give the know-how to get over the obstructing hump. Mention may be made of the variety of interests being explored at school (if it is that kind of school), and the teacher may tell of the feeling that at these ages it is good to find out something about many things, to gain a broad overall view and thereby have a wide field for selecting what is of most interest.

9. There are many things parents can do at home to strengthen a child's reading.

The teacher may want to mention reading with the child—listening to him read, reading to him, and providing him with a variety of reading material. Sometimes parents who did do a great deal of reading to the child when he was younger stop when he gets to the elementary grades because of his greater skill in doing it for himself. A teacher may point out that children's interest in affairs around them is greater than their ability to read about them; that is, they can understand much harder material than they can read for themselves. This suggests the desirability of continuing to read to and with them. Often it does not occur to the parents that the child would be very much interested in some magazine article or newspaper item if they read it with him.

About this time the matter of comic books comes up, and parents often complain that this is all the child will read. One reason (not the only one) is that pictures help to make it easy reading. So the teacher may suggest balancing comics and other easy reading with harder material read to or with the youngster. A word may be said about comic books and about the parent's reading them with the youngster in order to talk over with him

which ones are the best ones to read. Providing an interesting children's magazine and a variety of interesting books at home is a big help in strengthening a child's reading.

10. Giving a child opportunity to use knowledge gained at school provides useful practice.

The teacher might suggest such things as making up the weekly grocery list, checking the family laundry, sitting in on making the family budget or deciding on family expenditures, *having an allowance to manage, making place cards for family dinner parties, making gift enclosure cards, and so on.* Besides giving needed practice, doing things such as these lets a child see that what he is learning at school is useful and practical in everyday affairs. It adds to a child's self-respect, too, to feel that he has the know-how to be of help. A teacher may want to suggest that it is a big help when some question that comes up at school can be referred home for the needed information, with the parents helping the youngster to dig it out. In turn, then, questions that come up at home can be referred to school for the information needed.

11. Helping the youngster keep a record of his summer vacation or of family outings and trips is a useful school aid.

The teacher may mention how having his experiences in order and ready to tell about adds to the richness of the child's school-room living, besides giving him good practice in organizing his ideas and in presenting them to the other children. If parents help him in picking out the high spots, it serves the double purpose of stimulating the child's alertness in noticing and picking out interesting items to record and of giving him the feeling that his parents are interested in his having something of value to offer at school. Some parents will be ready to help the youngster work out a simple record form, perhaps to help him gather things to take to school to illustrate his points; such things as picture folders or samples of stones, shells, leaves, flowers, etc. If it is a

170 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

historical spot that is visited, special points of the guide's talk can be jotted down. It all provides a way to tie school and home experiences together, and parents are usually very ready to do it when they think about it.

12. It is of real importance to a child to have his parents attend school affairs.

Parents, of course, know that their youngster is eager to have them come to school when there is an exhibit, open house, program, or Parent-Teacher Association meeting. They may know that it means enough to him that he keeps at it until they say they will go. They may know that he was disappointed when one or the other or maybe both said that it would be impossible to be there.

A teacher can usually tell the parents a good many things about it that otherwise they would not know; how the youngster told the group, with a confidence and pride that would have pleased them, that *his parents* would *both* be there; how he explained that for good reason one or the other could not come, but that one would surely be on hand; or how he worked tirelessly helping to get things ready, commenting on how he wanted Mother to see this or how much Dad would like that.

Often a teacher will want to mention what an incentive it is to a child to have parents so interested that they will come, what an encouragement it is to him for them to be there to give the backing and support of their belief and pride in him, and what a satisfaction it is to him to have their spoken appreciation and praise of his accomplishment. To those parents who are timid about coming, the teacher may want to offer encouragement to come anyway, explaining how much a child needs family backing and how it gives him more confidence among other children to have it. To those parents who are indifferent or uninterested, a teacher may want to mention how the youngster maintained to the last minute that they would come, perhaps how he made

elaborate excuses for their not being there, or perhaps how he had little to say about it and little interest in having any part in the affair. Some parents need a lot of help to see how their interest, as shown in support of school affairs, is very important as an incentive to the youngster; how it spurs his ambition and gives him standing among the other children.

13. The way parents take the child's school marks is very important.

Whatever system of marking is used, and whatever different suggestions a teacher may offer to the parents of different children about their attitude toward the marks, *the way they take their child's grades is very important*. Any teacher is pretty certain to have in the group children whose parents demand high grades; others who want grades to be good enough but not at the expense of playtime and outside activities that they consider important; others who demand high grades in academic subjects but care less about music, art, and the like; and perhaps a few who pay no particular attention to the child's grades one way or the other.

The teacher may want to mention that children of these ages are pretty self-critical, eager to achieve, likely to be quite aware of where they stand in relation to other children, very sensitive to the approval and disapproval of the grown-ups. The parents' interest in the child's doing well and their praise and appreciation when he does are both a stimulus and an encouragement to the youngster. It may be pointed out that doing well does not always mean driving through for top grades in everything. It may mean good grades in things for which marks are given, and time allowed for things of value for which no grades are given. It may be suggested that it helps a child in evaluating his own work if parents talk over his marks with him, not calling him to account for them, but letting him tell what he thinks was considered in making up that mark. The teacher may want to mention that talking with a child about what he does well and where he needs

172 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

to improve can be very helpful. (It is helpful for the teacher to do it, too.)

Sometimes there may need to be comment that heavy pressure for top marks tends to make a child so tense and anxious that he does not get the most good out of his work, because his thought is on the grade and not on what he is learning. Often, too, it builds up a fear of failure that stands in the way of a child doing what he really might do if he felt freer. Many children acquire a dislike of school because of the parents' pressure for high grades. Some parents give a money reward for every top grade, which really is a form of pressure. A teacher may sometimes want to suggest that learning can be fun for the sake of the learning, without the monetary reward. Or perhaps that the parents' interest, as shown in talking over the schoolwork, often means more to a child than money. Mention may be made to some parents that urging the child to work harder discourages him if he is already working hard. In any case one is likely to want to speak to parents about how much their attitude toward grades affects the child's work and his feelings about it.

D. If He Is a Teen-Ager in High School

These young people will probably be from thirteen to seventeen or thereabouts, and in a four-year high school; perhaps a small one or perhaps a large one. In any case there will be several teachers touching the young person's school life. There may be a full-time counsellor or some teacher assigned for counselling, or it may be that any counselling which is done falls to those teachers who are concerned with the young people as individuals and who are therefore interested in whatever has to do with their well-being. There is no intention here to go into counselling matters. In fact, it is the intention *not* to do so, but to speak only of those things that any teacher might talk about with parents in the course of an interview.

It is recognized that, in many high schools, teachers rarely if ever speak to the parents. It is recognized, too, that in many in-

stances teachers do not know the young people who come to their classes in any individual way. However, in some high schools teachers do know their students and do talk with parents and do have, or could have, opportunity to offer general helpful suggestions. Often teachers would like to know the parents better but feel uncertain how the parents would feel about it, or feel that they are not qualified to go into the kind of matters a counsellor would handle, or feel that the things they would like to mention may seem trivial to the parents, or are fearful that the parents might think them presumptuous. Of course, there are some teachers who do not want to be bothered, or who feel that when youngsters get to high school their lives outside the classroom are none of the teacher's concern.

Sometimes a high school youngster feels embarrassed when his parents are the only ones, or among a few, who come to talk with one of his teachers; however, if interviews with parents become a generally established procedure this difficulty is obviated. As a matter of fact, the high school boy or girl who has confidence in his teachers usually is glad to have them meet his parents. That matter of having confidence is an important detail, because no youngster is very likely to want his parents to come if he has reason to think the teacher is going to let him down. This does not mean that a teacher must gloss over things that need to be talked about, but it does mean being entirely fair to the youngster and not doing anything that seems like tale-bearing.

There seem to be plenty of good reasons for teachers and parents of high school boys and girls to go on talking together just as in the years before. High school young people bring all their outside experiences to school in thought, just as they did in the grades. Their enjoyments and worries and wonderings affect their schoolwork just as before, and the parents are concerned about them and usually welcome a teacher's interest just as before. There still are many helpful suggestions a teacher can offer. Many of those already given apply at these ages as well as before.

1. Providing reference material at home is a great help in schoolwork.

A teacher can often suggest the kind of reference material that is most useful for the homework in some given field. It may be some magazine, encyclopedia, or the like, which the parent will be glad to get and to help the youngster to use. Parents skilled in some industrial or professional field often have reference material that it never occurred to them the teen-ager might be able to use. Sometimes a parent has a fund of knowledge that is good reference material in itself. When a teacher knows the parents and their fields of interest, a suggestion can often be dropped about something that would help the youngster's schoolwork. Sometimes a word can be said about encouraging the young person in getting his own reference library under way.

2. Parents' approval of work well done and pride in the accomplishment means a great deal to the teen-ager, even though he (or she) brushes it off.

The teacher's mention that the teen-ager's great desire to be grown-up often explains in part his nonchalance and don't-care air, may help parents to realize that this is just what their youngster's brush-off probably is. This brush-off is something parents often speak of with great concern. Frequently they have the idea that their opinions no longer carry weight with the boy or girl, and that their approval or disapproval is of no moment to the youngster. It can be very reassuring to hear from the teacher about the boy's very evident satisfaction when he reported, "Dad said it was swell," or the girl's beaming pride when she told that Mother's comment on the dress she had made was, "I couldn't have done better myself." A teacher may want to point out that when a boy or girl is neither a little child nor yet altogether grown-up there is a great uncertainty about how to act, which is often covered with a manner intended to show that he feels very sure of himself. With the uncertainty there is often a shyness

about expressing the feelings that lie the deepest; a fear that they will be thought childish. It is easy enough for parents to get the idea that the youngster does not care one whit what they think, when really he cares so much that he does not dare let himself show it, so he brushes off whatever is said. No matter if the parents' approval is brushed off, it is wanted just the same. And it is needed to bolster confidence. No matter if opinions seem to be brushed off, too, they are probably given more attention than would appear.

3. For the sake of the young person's self-respect, it is a good idea to reduce criticism as much as possible.

The teacher may bring up one matter that the parents are probably already well aware of; that is, that a great deal of the teen-ager's time goes to thinking about hair, and nose, and freckles, and clothes, and the general effect being made on people around. This is often a matter of great annoyance to parents. There may be comment that the scrutinizing of freckles, worry over shape of nose, and the effort to dress exactly as the others do is part of the building up of a feeling of assurance, confidence, and self-respect. This suggests the need for much approval and little criticism, the need for having good points emphasized and the others played down.

A homemaking teacher may want to mention discussions in class about the selection of materials and clothes design that will play down undue tallness or plumpness, or the use of color in making the most of hair, eyes, and skin. A gym teacher may speak of the things being done to make for ease and grace of movement. The homeroom teacher may speak of achievement that the music or science or English teacher has mentioned, suggesting that it is a big boost to the teen-ager to have things such as these brought up for comment. Once again it is the suggestion to build on strength, not ignoring weakness, but not putting all the emphasis on that and forgetting to mention the strength.

4. It is best not to push teen-agers into feeling they must do thus or so when they are through high school.

A teacher can be more helpful to parents (and so to youngsters) if, instead of condemning them for trying to decide their child's future for him, it is understood that it is usually their great concern and interest that makes them do it. If this boy or girl's abilities lie in a field other than the one chosen by the parents, the teacher may comment on this, perhaps suggesting the wisdom of letting the child follow his bent. Sometimes it helps to point out that the skills or abilities needed for the field of work chosen by the parents differ from those their youngster shows. Or perhaps no special bent has become evident and parents feel that the time has come when something should be decided upon. The teacher may suggest their helping the child to look into different kinds of occupations, perhaps arranging for him to interview people in various fields or to visit different industries to see where his interest might click. The teacher may want to tell of discussions there have been in classes about work after high school, and of how much more seriously many of the young people are considering the matter than their carefree behavior might lead one to think.

5. Parents who are concerned about late hours may find it helpful to get together and agree on the same regulations.

This is something parents frequently speak to teachers about, complaining that the boy or girl stays out much too late but that he (or she) insists on doing what the others in the crowd do. A teacher may mention that other parents feel the same way, and suggest getting together to talk over what might be done. Perhaps it can be pointed out, or the parents may already realize, how important it is to a teen-ager *not* to be different from the crowd either in dress, in haircut, in hours kept, in language used, or in anything else. That is not just a silly notion, it is part of being one of a group; and that, a teacher can emphasize, is as important

as anything a child has to accomplish, even though it is agreed that staying out until all hours is not a good way to do it. The teacher may suggest that a group of the parents and some of the young people might get together to talk over the problem and see what might be done. It can be pointed out that the youngsters do have good judgment when it comes to tackling a problem together, and that they would probably be glad enough to get a little more sleep if they could do it without losing standing in the crowd. It might be that party-closing hour could be agreed upon that would satisfy both parents and youngsters.

6. Giving a teen-ager opportunity for being in with the crowd is closely related to school progress.

Mention has been made, from the beginning school days on, that friends mean so much to a child that often attention cannot be wholly given to schoolwork if he is on the outside of friendship groups; that the drive to do what the group wants may take precedence over what either parents or teachers ask; that for many children good grades are wholly devoid of satisfaction if they are gained at the expense of having time for group doings; that the enjoyment of school goes hand in hand with laughing, talking, working, sharing (even quarreling) with others. The teacher may mention that this is true in high school as well as in the grades and may suggest that club membership, being in on group parties, and participation in so-called extracurricular activities are a very necessary part of school. Some parents may feel that their youngster is giving too much time to remunerative work in order to get the money for all these things which they are unable to provide. There may be some who can provide the money but who feel that full time should be given to study. There may be a few who are inclined to push the youngster into social achievement at the expense of academic accomplishment. Many are genuinely puzzled to know where to draw the line. It is often a great help to talk the matter over with the teacher and to be reassured that being one of the group is really

178 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

closely related to good schoolwork. A teacher may tell how, in student group discussions, it becomes evident that everyone has these problems of working out good relationships with others, and how it reassures the teen-agers to know that others have the same problems they do. Many think that something is wrong with them when they have difficulties in group relationships.

7. Parents' recognition and appreciation of good school progress, without putting on heavy pressure, is a help in keeping it up.

A teacher may want to mention that high school youngsters, just as in the years before, need the incentive of the parents' interest in their school achievement. Often parents do not keep up with the details of the different subjects the boy or girl is taking and so keep an eye on school achievement only in a general way. The teacher may mention how much it means to the young person to have parents interested in each little bit of achievement as well as in the overall picture; not standing over the youngster to see that it is done but just letting him know one cares what he does and is proud of him when he does well. Any teacher can cite instances of young people putting forth great effort because of the parents' justified pride in them, or of others who suffered for lack of someone's being proud of them.

8. The independence of youth is something to rejoice in and to nurture.

The teacher may tell of instances of fine independent thinking done by the particular high school student: perhaps of opinions set forth and maintained in some discussion group on current affairs; perhaps of leadership taken on the student council in standing up for some policy the boy or girl believed to be right; perhaps of some project undertaken and carried through to completion. The teacher's spoken belief in the good judgment of the young person, his integrity, and his fine sense of principle, may be very reassuring to parents who are not quite sure what to make

of this independence, which may be more than they themselves knew as high school youngsters. A teacher might point out that Army Service has demanded earlier independence of boys than used to be; that the whole trend of present-day living calls for earlier independence for both boys and girls.

There may be parents who are concerned about independence that is not fully balanced with good judgment, and others who theoretically want the youngster to be independent, but practically find his independence hard to take. The teacher may want to suggest that perhaps the young person is more ready for independence than the parents have thought, that perhaps more growing up has been going on than they realized, and that maybe there are points at which they could ease up on controls. Often a teacher can tell of comments made in student group discussions that throw light on how the young people feel, being watchful of course not to identify the one making the comments. Teachers of homemaking are in a good position to pass along enlightening comments, because of the discussions on family relationships that always come up in these classes. Anyway, a teacher can point out that young people do have to become independent and that one may well be glad when they want to. It helps, sometimes, to mention that the independence does not mean they need the parents less, but only in a different way.

9. One may as well accept dating as part of teen-age interests.

Some parents take dating in their stride, just as they have taken all of the child's growing. Some meet it with shocked surprise that their boy or girl should be so grown up. Some meet it with disapproval, or perhaps with ridicule and teasing. Some feel that the youngster is too young to begin dating and a few wish that their children—girls particularly—would hurry up and get at it so they can marry young.

The teacher may want to speak of how natural it is for boy-girl friendships to develop within the crowd and of how the first pairing off can still be kept a part of the group activity if there

the same, they really are growing up. Many parents do not realize that perhaps the time has come for the earlier child-parent relationships to change to more of a friend-adviser relationship, still close and warm, but recognizing the youngster's growing desire and ability to act independently. Mention of this may bring up comment, sometimes resentful or hurt, from the parent about the boy or girl's outspoken criticism of the parents' appearance, dress, and manners, and the youngster's effort to remodel the parents according to a newer pattern. A teacher may want to speak of this as part of the new relationship, in which the youngster does some advising, too. It may be pointed out that this comes about partly because the young person cares so much about the parents that he looks at them with such a critical eye. He wants them to pass muster with his friends, and he has a mental picture of what the parents must be like to do so. Perhaps the teacher can comment that accepting the criticism in good part, if one can, gives the youngster evidence that he really is getting on a friend-to-friend footing where he can speak his mind. A teacher may sometimes want to tell how, in class, the young people have mentioned with appreciation having their opinions asked for and considered in selecting new home furnishings or in planning a new home; or being allowed to select their own clothes without too much advice, perhaps going on some shopping expeditions on their own; or having the opportunity to plan their own parties without a lot of arguing; or having their friends accepted without critical comments and allowed to come without fear of their being talked down to, brushed off, or made an embarrassing fuss over; or of having family friends come without fear of parental comments about one's behavior or orders to do this or that; or having their privacy respected with no prying into treasure boxes, diaries, or dresser drawers, and no demand to "tell everything" as in childhood days. The teacher may mention that it is such things as these that young people look upon as *not* treating them "like babies."

As one reads over the suggestions mentioned here it may sound as if the teacher is doing all the talking and perhaps all the sug-

the same, they really are growing up. Many parents do not realize that perhaps the time has come for the earlier child-parent relationships to change to more of a friend-adviser relationship, still close and warm, but recognizing the youngster's growing desire and ability to act independently. Mention of this may bring up comment, sometimes resentful or hurt, from the parent about the boy or girl's outspoken criticism of the parents' appearance, dress, and manners, and the youngster's effort to remodel the parents according to a newer pattern. A teacher may want to speak of this as part of the new relationship, in which the youngster does some advising, too. It may be pointed out that this comes about partly because the young person cares so much about the parents that he looks at them with such a critical eye. He wants them to pass muster with his friends, and he has a mental picture of what the parents must be like to do so. Perhaps the teacher can comment that accepting the criticism in good part, if one can, gives the youngster evidence that he really is getting on a friend-to-friend footing where he can speak his mind. A teacher may sometimes want to tell how, in class, the young people have mentioned with appreciation having their opinions asked for and considered in selecting new home furnishings or in planning a new home; or being allowed to select their own clothes without too much advice, perhaps going on some shopping expeditions on their own; or having the opportunity to plan their own parties without a lot of arguing; or having their friends accepted without critical comments and allowed to come without fear of their being talked down to, brushed off, or made an embarrassing fuss over; or of having family friends come without fear of parental comments about one's behavior or orders to do this or that; or having their privacy respected with no prying into treasure boxes, diaries, or dresser drawers, and no demand to "tell everything" as in childhood days. The teacher may mention that it is such things as these that young people look upon as *not* treating them "like babies."

As one reads over the suggestions mentioned here it may sound as if the teacher is doing all the talking and perhaps all the sug-

180 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

are plenty of things for the whole crowd to do at home or at the homes of friends. Usually, too, the boy-girl friendships do not replace the boy-boy, or girl-girl "best friends." It is a broadening of friendships—an exploring of a new sort of friendship—and is a natural part of growing up.

It is reassuring to many parents to find that dating is discussed freely in classes in many schools; perhaps in homemaking classes, perhaps in others. It surprises some parents to find that both boys and girls are enrolled in classes in marriage and the family and that they talk freely and comfortably about whatever comes up. A teacher can tell parents many bits of the discussions without betraying the confidence of the youngsters or identifying the ones making this remark or that. It may interest parents to know that discussions on dating cover such things as how to ask for a date, how to send a date home, pros and cons of petting, and so on. Parents often comment that their youngster will take no advice along these lines from them. A teacher can mention that often young people will talk more freely in a group of people their own age than when alone with an older person, and that often it is easier to talk with an outside person than with their own parents. It may be pointed out, too, that in the class discussions the teacher does not give outright advice but only brings up different ideas for the young people to think about and discuss. The teacher may speak of using some of the good films available now for classroom showing to start off the discussions. Often parents will be interested in seeing the films, too, and they can be used at a group meeting.

10. The teen-ager longs for the feeling of being grown-up, and it helps to treat him so.

A homemaking teacher (and perhaps others) will often have occasion to speak of class discussions in which it comes out that the young people are disgruntled because they feel they are treated "like babies" at home. Often it seems to parents that they do act pretty infantile at times (and they probably do), but just

the same, they really are growing up. Many parents do not realize that perhaps the time has come for the earlier child-parent relationships to change to more of a friend-adviser relationship, still close and warm, but recognizing the youngster's growing desire and ability to act independently. Mention of this may bring up comment, sometimes resentful or hurt, from the parent about the boy or girl's outspoken criticism of the parents' appearance, dress, and manners, and the youngster's effort to remodel the parents according to a newer pattern. A teacher may want to speak of this as part of the new relationship, in which the youngster does some advising, too. It may be pointed out that this comes about partly because the young person cares so much about the parents that he looks at them with such a critical eye. He wants them to pass muster with his friends, and he has a mental picture of what the parents must be like to do so. Perhaps the teacher can comment that accepting the criticism in good part, if one can, gives the youngster evidence that he really is getting on a friend-to-friend footing where he can speak his mind. A teacher may sometimes want to tell how, in class, the young people have mentioned with appreciation having their opinions asked for and considered in selecting new home furnishings or in planning a new home; or being allowed to select their own clothes without too much advice, perhaps going on some shopping expeditions on their own; or having the opportunity to plan their own parties without a lot of arguing; or having their friends accepted without critical comments and allowed to come without fear of their being talked down to, brushed off, or made an embarrassing fuss over; or of having family friends come without fear of parental comments about one's behavior or orders to do this or that; or having their privacy respected with no prying into treasure boxes, diaries, or dresser drawers, and no demand to "tell everything" as in childhood days. The teacher may mention that it is such things as these that young people look upon as *not* treating them "like babies."

As one reads over the suggestions mentioned here it may sound as if the teacher is doing all the talking and perhaps all the sug-

182 TYPES OF SUGGESTIONS A TEACHER CAN GIVE

gesting. This is not so. If the interview is a friendly talking together, the parents will be doing some suggesting too; probably a lot of it if they find that the teacher wants them to. Their tips on how their youngster feels about one thing or another can be very helpful, and the giving and taking of suggestions is one good reason for having interviews.

10. Some suggestions about what to do if—

AS A TEACHER THINKS ABOUT INTERVIEWS with parents, she often wonders what to do if this or that happens, and this often brings a little fear of undertaking the interview. Teachers frequently pass the word along to each other to look out for this situation or to beware of that one, or relate the difficulties encountered with one parent or another, and the more these are repeated the bigger and more formidable the *ifs* become. Strangely enough, the *ifs* seem usually to be in terms of the difficult situations. One rarely hears, "What if we get together and talk things over comfortably?" "What if I am able to give some help?" "What if the parents give me just the information I need to understand Johnny?" Chances are these very things will happen many times to balance (or overbalance) the things that perhaps are not so pleasant. And a teacher who genuinely *wants* to talk with the parents, to give help to them and to learn from them, will find that her understanding deepens and she will gain skill in knowing what to do when the difficulties arise, as they will. Gathered together in this chapter are some suggestions for clearing the way when the difficulties appear, so that talking together can go on usefully and not get bogged

down in hurt feelings, discouragement, or fear of not knowing what to do next.

A. Some Typical "Ifs" Relating to Attitude

Often some feeling or attitude rears its head and obstructs the progress of the interview. It may be the parents' or the teacher's or both. It is not surprising that this should be so, when one considers all the feelings that teacher and parents bring to their talks together. The fact that it is there means that it has to be taken into account. It is no use to say that the feelings should not be there; if they are, they are, and one has to begin from there. Maybe there is good reason for them. Perhaps the teacher can understand the feeling, perhaps not, but the fact that she *wants* to is a good start. Wanting to understand pretty well disposes of the condemnation which does no one any good.

A teacher does well to remember that the real purpose for talking together is that the youngster may benefit. There can be little benefit to him if teacher and parents are at cross purposes, so the sooner any obstruction can be cleared out of the way the better. Following are some suggestions for doing this in some rather common situations.

1. If the parent comes to the interview angry about some incident.

It is quite natural that if the parent is angry about something the teacher will be the one to hear about it. Perhaps the child has been "picked on." Perhaps the last homework assignment was the final straw that made the parent, who did not believe in homework anyway, blow up. Perhaps another child received the honor or award or recognition that his youngster had hoped for, and there are charges of unfairness and favoritism. Perhaps one of the child's possessions has been lost and the parents feel that the teacher should have kept better track of things.

A parent who is angry usually wants to talk, and a teacher does well not to be in any great hurry to get a word in. Nothing

is lost by waiting until the story is told. If one can listen attentively, without mulling over the defense to be presented the moment the parent pauses, some information will probably be gathered which will help in understanding the situation. Often one will see that there *were* some grounds for complaint. Or it may be apparent that there were some facts the parent did not know. Or perhaps there was lack of understanding of the school's position on this or that, and of the reasons for this position.

When the story has been told, one may want to ask for more detail, to make some explanation, or to ask the parent to come back when there has been time for the teacher to look into the matter. Anger usually fades away when it is met with a genuine wish to understand and when the parent gets a feeling of assurance that there will be a fair and respectful hearing. A teacher is fortunate who can meet the parents' anger without becoming irritated and defensive. A parent usually senses very quickly when a teacher is really listening and not just waiting impatiently for a chance to talk.

Having the anger disappear, though, is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of reaching the point where things can be talked over quietly and thoughtfully. If a teacher sees that this is not likely to happen at the moment, it is usually a good idea to suggest a return at another time; a short time, though, so that the delay will have no appearance of a brush-off. Anger is nothing to fear, though it is not pleasant to meet. It helps if a teacher can see it *not* as a personal attack but as a striking out at a situation that the parent has resented.

2. If the parent is ready to accept any suggestion offered, but never does anything about it.

This is a situation in which it is very easy for a teacher to get impatient and annoyed. It really can seem quite exasperating to offer what one feels are useful suggestions, have them listened to with apparent attention and acceptance, and then never see any evidence of their being carried out. This is sometimes a sort

of passive resistance on the parents' part, sometimes just taking the easiest way out, sometimes not really understanding what the suggestion was about, sometimes not feeling that it is practical but not wanting to argue with the teacher, and sometimes not really caring one way or the other but wanting to keep things smooth and pleasant. In some cases the parents may not have wanted suggestions in the first place.

The teacher may need to examine the suggestions to see if they are practical for that child, that home, and those parents. Maybe the suggestions were too specific. It often is better to talk over with the parents *what* needs to be accomplished, leaving the *how* of doing it to them. For example, one teacher's suggestion that the ten-year-old be taken for a visit to the art museum brought no responsive action because the parents were not especially interested in museums. When it was later suggested that the youngster's schoolwork would profit by some experiences that would give him things of interest to talk about, he was taken to Chicago (they lived nearby) to see the Railroad Exhibit and, later, for a trip through an automotive plant where his father worked.

Sometimes suggestions are too general instead of too specific. For example, suggestions that the youngster be given some homework help, or that experience with some easy books would help reading, or that a handicraft outfit might add to skill in the use of hands, and the like, may bring no results because the parents do not know how to carry them out. Often if the kind of homework help needed is described, they would be glad enough to give it. Or if some titles of easy books to read are suggested, with mention of places to get them, it makes it easy for the parents to do it. The same applies to the handicraft outfits. When a teacher puts herself in the parents' place mentally, it helps in knowing whether to be specific or general.

Sometimes the resistance is to the tone in which suggestions are given, rather than to the suggestion itself. A teacher does well not to be demanding or insistent and not to labor the point. If the given parents never take any suggestion, and if nothing the

teacher can do seems to remedy the situation, then that is the way it is. For some reason they are not ready. She can still go on being friendly, telling about the child's school doings, waiting for the time when maybe a suggestion will be wanted. The year may go by without that time coming, but perhaps the groundwork has been laid for the next teacher.

3. If the parent brushes off any discussion of things the teacher feels are important.

A teacher is apt to feel a little set-back when an account of some achievement of the child's is met with amusement that he should have cared enough about *that* to put forth such effort. Or it may be annoying when an inquiry about why the parent thinks he might have done this or that is answered with a gay, "Just like his father," or "I always was that way too," or "Oh, you never know why he does what he does." Or when comment on some matter that the teacher feels needs correction meets an amused chuckle, "Well, I'm glad he's not a sissy," or "Oh, he'll outgrow that," and the blithe evasion of any serious consideration of the matter. It does little good to try to push the point then, though one can come back to it another time. Often a teacher can only guess at the reason for the evasion. Perhaps it is the idea of keeping everything on a gay, social footing; perhaps a surface lightness that covers a fear of being serious; perhaps a feeling of being inadequate to do anything about it; perhaps a lack of understanding of why it seems important to the teacher; perhaps a concern with other affairs that seem more important.

Even though the teacher may not be able to do much about the parents' attitude, the interview may have served a good purpose in helping to explain the youngster's apathy and lackadaisical interest, or his constant appeals for approval, or his impenetrable reserve except for occasional outbursts, or whatever way it is that he reacts to the nonchalant attitude of the parents. A teacher may be tempted not to bother any more with those parents, but after all they are the child's parents, and even though

one does not talk with them, they are still there in the child's thought. And one never knows what lies behind the apparent lack of serious interest in the youngster. Many times a teacher who has persisted in friendliness and has gone on with talking with one parent or the other as occasion offered has found the friendliness welcome. With that as a basis, some progress can be made, even though it may be less than one might wish.

4. If the parent is always in such a hurry to leave that there can be no real discussion.

If it is a mother who is coming from a day's work at office or factory or store and who is on her way to get supper and do the laundry and the cleaning and bathe the youngsters and get them to bed, one can understand why she may not relax for an easy, comfortable talk. Maybe it is a father on the way home from the day's work, tired, eager to get home and get clothes changed and into the garden, and perhaps wondering why he should stop to talk about the youngster anyway, when things seem to be going all right. In situations such as these many teachers have found that arranging to go to the home for the interview makes for much more relaxed talking together. Parents often speak with great appreciation of some teacher who has given evening or week-end time to come to talk with them because she understood why they were in a hurry to be gone when the interview was at school.

Sometimes the hurry is for other reasons; hurry to get to a social engagement, hurry to get to the golf course, or hurry to get home to get ready to be gone again. Sometimes they are in a hurry to get away before things come up that they might have to do something about, or that they do not want to talk about. Sometimes it is just the habit of never quite having time enough for what needs to be done; the habit of always being a lap behind and frantically trying to catch up.

Whatever the reason, if a mother just seems to light for a moment and is on the edge of her chair eager to go, or if a father

comes in such a hurry that he does not have time to even sit down and keeps moving toward the door, it is best to be brief and pleasant. It is useless to waste precious time in being annoyed. It is better to have one really important point and get right to it. Then, if that catches attention, the parent may stay longer than he intended, and the teacher can go on with other things. It is reassuring to parents to know that a teacher *can* and *will* be brief. Some have said, in defense of their hurry, that they have to or they would never get away. Others have said that they want to get away before they are told a lot of things to do.

Such comments can well be taken by a teacher as words of warning to let some things wait for another time; to be watchful not to overtalk; to be brief, but not so brief that she seems abrupt or hurried. It often helps in reducing the parent's hurry if a teacher can remain genuinely relaxed, unhurried, unbothered, appreciative of the parent's coming, cordial in hoping for another interview, willing to arrange the next interview at a more convenient time, and gracious in letting the interview end when the parent indicates. One is often surprised at how the hurry lessens as parents come to feel that they will always be met with friendliness and will not be pushed or pressured, and that the teacher has real interest in their youngster.

5. If the mother comes for the interview and always blames any difficulty on the father.

This is often accompanied by the statement that she would like to do this or that but cannot because of the father's attitude, or that the child is the way he is because of the father's severe punishment or lack of any punishment, or that all her efforts go for nothing because the father will not back her up. In a situation such as this, it is not for the teacher to condemn one parent or the other or sympathize unduly as the mother tells her troubles. The father might have a very different story to tell. The teacher may want to ask him to come in to talk about the same matters relating to the youngster that were being discussed with the

7. If the parent wants recipes that are guaranteed to work.

This is perhaps one of the most common situations a teacher has to meet in interviewing. The parents want to do a good job. They see certain behavior they want to change or to produce, and they want to know how to do it. They want the teacher to tell them. The teacher wants to be helpful and has ideas about what ought to be done or not done, *but* it is best to be very cautious about being too ready to say, "Do it this way," or "Don't do it that way." It is well for her to get it firmly fixed in her mind that there *is* no one way of doing things. Then she will more easily resist the temptation to *give* the parents the answer, instead of helping them to find it. As a matter of fact the parents are the only ones who *can* find the answer for them and their home and their child.

A teacher can be helpful in raising questions about what it is they want to accomplish; in telling of the many ways that different parents have worked out a similar problem; in offering comments or information about children in general, leading to more insight into the child's behavior or to better understanding of what it is reasonable to expect; in bringing up the question of this particular child's characteristics, abilities, and probable reactions. In the course of such conversation parents are likely to suggest that they might try this or that, and the teacher may add another this or that, but in the long run it is only the parents who can possibly decide what they can and will do. A teacher can give encouragement, can offer ideas with which to think, can be ready to talk things over, can watch with them for progress, and can speak of confidence in their working out what to do. But to give a recipe guaranteed to work; that is impossible.

8. If the parent wants to talk about the "problem" but is reluctant to give it up.

A teacher who is new to interviewing is often astonished to find a parent who wants to talk about the "problem" frequently

and long, but who is really very reluctant to have it solved, and if it is disposed of, immediately seizes upon another. Such a parent is likely to have tried without success everything one can think of to suggest. Requests for interviews will probably be frequent, with detailed recountals of what has been done and said and various theories offered of why none of it worked. Such interviews can become very time-consuming without apparently accomplishing much. This is the kind of parent a teacher is likely to be tempted to avoid or to dispose of as soon as possible, yet that very parent may be the one most hungry for attention and recognition and friendliness, and much may be done for the youngster by giving it. Some teachers have looked for and found talents that suggested a contribution the parent could make at school, which gave needed recognition and reduced the need for resorting to "problems." Some have persisted in a friendliness that bolstered the parent's confidence to the point of tackling the problem, at least in part. Some have been able to help in turning attention to the child's strength, thereby lessening a little the attention given to the problem.

Often a teacher must protect the time that can be given to interviews from being monopolized by the problem-cherishing parent. A given time can be set and adhered to, with the explanation at the end that another appointment is waiting or that the teacher has an obligation elsewhere. When the parent appears without appointment, as often happens, it can be explained that this time belongs to the children, and an appointment can be made for another time. If the parent can observe in the classroom, this will provide a good basis for the forthcoming interview, giving attention to discussion of what was seen rather than the "problem." This is often the beginning of a broadening point of view that helps to reduce the problem to its proper proportions.

9. If the teacher feels irritated and annoyed.

In the course of interviews with many different parents, it is not surprising that now and then things should be said or done

that make a teacher feel mildly irritated, or even downright annoyed, and sometimes a bit angry. When these feelings come, even though a teacher may try to hide them, the parent is pretty likely to catch it, in tone, manner, gesture, tightening of lips, or in the general feeling of tension, if not in spoken words. If the annoyance is outspoken, at least the parent knows what it is all about. Sometimes the matter can be talked out; sometimes continuing the interview at that time only serves to set teacher and parent more and more at cross purposes, perhaps with resort to argument and defensive or self-justifying comments that serve no especially good purpose. A teacher can pretty well tell whether continued conversation that day is likely to do any good or whether the interview better be left for some other time, when irritation has calmed down.

It is perfectly natural to feel irritation and often there is plenty to justify annoyance, but talks together do seem to have a better chance of accomplishing more when the teacher can take whatever comes in stride, not putting on any air of controlled calm, resigned patience, or forced and unnatural serenity, but genuinely accepting the parents and whatever is said without any feeling of personal affront, rancor, or blame.

It helps sometimes to look into one's own thinking to see *why* the irritation flared up. Maybe it was a spoken or implied criticism of the teacher's way of doing something. Maybe it was a patronizing air that seemed designed to put the teacher in place. Maybe it was a flouting of suggestions that the teacher thought were good ones. Maybe it was a flatly spoken opinion that was directly counter to the teacher's own. Maybe it was spoken blame that the teacher felt was wholly unjustified. Maybe it was interruption before the teacher could finish a sentence, or a barrage of questions without waiting for answer, or a running monologue on irrelevant matters while the time for the interview ticked rapidly away, or personal questions the teacher considered none of the parents' business.

But why should these things, of any of dozens of others that

that make a teacher feel mildly irritated, or even downright annoyed, and sometimes a bit angry. When these feelings come, even though a teacher may try to hide them, the parent is pretty likely to catch it, in tone, manner, gesture, tightening of lips, or in the general feeling of tension, if not in spoken words. If the annoyance is outspoken, at least the parent knows what it is all about. Sometimes the matter can be talked out; sometimes continuing the interview at that time only serves to set teacher and parent more and more at cross purposes, perhaps with resort to argument and defensive or self-justifying comments that serve no especially good purpose. A teacher can pretty well tell whether continued conversation that day is likely to do any good or whether the interview better be left for some other time, when irritation has calmed down.

It is perfectly natural to feel irritation and often there is plenty to justify annoyance, but talks together do seem to have a better chance of accomplishing more when the teacher can take whatever comes in stride, not putting on any air of controlled calm, resigned patience, or forced and unnatural serenity, but genuinely accepting the parents and whatever is said without any feeling of personal affront, rancor, or blame.

It helps sometimes to look into one's own thinking to see *why* the irritation flared up. Maybe it was a spoken or implied criticism of the teacher's way of doing something. Maybe it was a patronizing air that seemed designed to put the teacher in place. Maybe it was a flouting of suggestions that the teacher thought were good ones. Maybe it was a flatly spoken opinion that was directly counter to the teacher's own. Maybe it was spoken blame that the teacher felt was wholly unjustified. Maybe it was interruption before the teacher could finish a sentence, or a barrage of questions without waiting for answer, or a running monologue on irrelevant matters while the time for the interview ticked rapidly away, or personal questions the teacher considered none of the parents' business.

But why should these things, of any of dozens of others that

teachers have named as riling incidents, be irritating and annoying? Perhaps pride is hurt. Perhaps lurking somewhere is the feeling that the teacher should not be criticized, but should be deferred to and treated as one who probably has the answers. Perhaps there is a little fear of not being fully equal to the situation. Perhaps one is not too sure that what was done was best and would rather not have the subject come up. Perhaps there is feeling that the parent is not doing what he (or she) "should," or that he is not as amenable to suggestion as he "should be," or that he "won't" do thus and so, no matter what one says. The feeling about what parents "should" and "won't" do is often the basis of the irritation and annoyance. The sooner a teacher can get over the feeling of responsibility for reforming parents, the sooner irritation at their lack of reform will be reduced. After all, no one can change the parents' behavior and the thinking out of which the behavior comes except the parents themselves. And always a teacher does well to remember, as a father once said, "You have to be the kind of parent you can be." Accepting parents as they are without setting up a mental image of what they "should" be precludes the irritation which comes from disappointment when they fall short.

As for the irritation that comes from hurt pride or injured dignity, a teacher who keeps her thought centered on helping the youngster will pay less and less attention to personal feelings. Although criticism is hard to take, one can learn to look upon it as useful, both in revealing the parents' thinking and in pointing to things to which thought perhaps might well be given. The irritation that comes from fear of not being adequate to meet whatever may come up in the interview can be greatly lessened with the building up of the feeling that, after all, the interview is just a matter of the people who are most intimately concerned with the child's well-being coming together to talk about it.

When irritating and annoying things occur, a teacher may need to guard against the temptation to recount them to other teachers, relating what "they" said and what "I" said. This usu-

that make a teacher feel mildly irritated, or even downright annoyed, and sometimes a bit angry. When these feelings come, even though a teacher may try to hide them, the parent is pretty likely to catch it, in tone, manner, gesture, tightening of lips, or in the general feeling of tension, if not in spoken words. If the annoyance is outspoken, at least the parent knows what it is all about. Sometimes the matter can be talked out; sometimes continuing the interview at that time only serves to set teacher and parent more and more at cross purposes, perhaps with resort to argument and defensive or self-justifying comments that serve no especially good purpose. A teacher can pretty well tell whether continued conversation that day is likely to do any good or whether the interview better be left for some other time, when irritation has calmed down.

It is perfectly natural to feel irritation and often there is plenty to justify annoyance, but talks together do seem to have a better chance of accomplishing more when the teacher can take whatever comes in stride, not putting on any air of controlled calm, resigned patience, or forced and unnatural serenity, but genuinely accepting the parents and whatever is said without any feeling of personal affront, rancor, or blame.

It helps sometimes to look into one's own thinking to see *why* the irritation flared up. Maybe it was a spoken or implied criticism of the teacher's way of doing something. Maybe it was a patronizing air that seemed designed to put the teacher in place. Maybe it was a flouting of suggestions that the teacher thought were good ones. Maybe it was a flatly spoken opinion that was directly counter to the teacher's own. Maybe it was spoken blame that the teacher felt was wholly unjustified. Maybe it was interruption before the teacher could finish a sentence, or a barrage of questions without waiting for answer, or a running monologue on irrelevant matters while the time for the interview ticked rapidly away, or personal questions the teacher considered none of the parents' business.

But why should these things, of any of dozens of others that

terest in various hobbies, or training in some special field, or enjoyment of music, art, or literature; or interest and perhaps proficiency in sports, and so on.

The parents have one kind of experience; the teacher another. The parents know the child at home; the teacher at school. So each has something to give to the other.

B. If Matters Come Up That Do Not Lie Within the Teacher's Province

This matter of what is understood to lie within the teacher's province to talk with the parents about and what does not varies greatly from school to school. One may be in a school where all interviews with parents are held by some specialist on the staff assigned for that duty. It may be the counsellor or psychologist or social worker or perhaps the nurse. In such a school the teacher's contacts with parents may be pretty well limited to the casual ones made at PTA meetings, or open house, or some special school program.

Or it may be a school where the teachers have interviews with the parents on routine school matters, but are expected to refer the parent to the appropriate specialist in case any matter of behavior difficulty, a health problem, or the like should come up.

Perhaps the school is one where the teachers are responsible for the interviews with parents, the specialists being available to give advice and counsel to the teacher and to take over if the situation is one calling for specialized help. A teacher is fortunate to have an understanding specialist to turn to for help and guidance, and when there is such help, it is of utmost importance to know when and how to use it; to know which things that come up are ones to which one does not have or cannot be expected to have the answers.

One may be in a school where there are no such specialists on the staff. Perhaps, however, there are community agencies to which one can turn for help, such as health agencies, welfare agencies, recreational groups, and the like. It is a good idea for a

ally is really the seeking to be assured that one was justified in being annoyed and that one probably made just the right replies. It is best always to keep interviews confidential.

10. If the teacher feels too inexperienced to give much help.

It helps to think of the interview as talking together, rather than as a time when a parent sits down and waits for the teacher to give the answers. Thinking of it as one step in getting acquainted may help to take away the feeling of having to be profound, of needing to know a great deal about everything, or even of having to be helpful right off. Many times the most helpful thing one can do is to let the parents see that the child's teacher is a friendly, pleasant, comfortable sort of person who is probably going to be nice to know.

Recognizing the richness of assets that any teacher is pretty sure to have can help in giving confidence that, when occasion demands, she really *has* something to give. Among these assets will be all the experiences covered in the course of preparation for teaching. There will be the study of what children are like; of their play activities; of how they learn; of what play materials, books, music, and so on are suitable at different ages; of how to help them learn to read, write, spell; and, in the grades and high school, how to open up all the various subject matter fields. All of this provides many practical details which a teacher has to offer. Besides these, there are all the experiences one has had with individual children and groups of different ages, all of them adding to one's understanding of children: experiences with children in the family, in church groups, in clubs, scouts, Y and similar groups, in camp, as well as in student teaching. Each year in a teaching position adds to what one has to give. There are also all the experiences and study giving an understanding of family living: the living in one's own family, what one has seen in the families of relatives, friends, neighbors, and in those of the children with whom one has worked. Included in the assets are a teacher's own personal experiences: perhaps travel, or in-

aware that such matters are best left alone but may still wonder what to do when they come up.

As one becomes accustomed to talking with parents it becomes easier to listen without being shocked, or showing disapproval or approval; just listening with attention and interest, but with interest that has no element of judging in it. Listening may not be enough. Comment may be needed, but it need not show blame or approval. Perhaps the parent has said that the youngster's difficulty is because he hears so much quarreling at home. Often a teacher can follow along with a noncommittal, questioning sort of comment, "You think it is because of quarreling at home?" Later one may meet the statement, "I guess a divorce is the only answer," with the noncommittal comment, "You feel a divorce will be best?" This sort of comment does not commit the teacher and leaves a parent free to go on thinking aloud.

If there is a school social worker or guidance counsellor, the teacher may want to ask whether the parent would like to talk to that person to get more help than the teacher can give. Perhaps all the teacher can do is to express willingness to be of any possible assistance to the youngster, mentioning that having this information helps in understanding his behavior. The main point here is that the marital difficulties of parents lie outside the teacher's province. They are of concern, of course, because of the effect on the youngster and because of one's friendliness for the parents. If teacher and parents talk of how the parents' difficulties are affecting the child, one needs to be watchful that this, too, is done with no air of blaming or condemning either parent, for that is not the teacher's business. It is only that a situation has been described which throws light on the child's schoolwork and the teacher wants to find how to be most helpful to the youngster.

One cannot be too careful about holding things of this sort in the *strictest confidence*. Sometimes a teacher feels that the counsellor or social worker should know, even though the parent has asked that it not be mentioned to anyone, or has said that the teacher is the only one who knows. She may wonder, too,

198 SUGGESTIONS ABOUT WHAT TO DO IF—

teacher to find out what agencies there are and what services are available, because often things come up for which help is at hand if only one knows how to get it. Maybe the school has made official arrangements with these agencies for using their services. If not, and if a teacher wants to make individual contacts, it should be done through her principal or superintendent or with his knowledge and consent.

Often one is in a school where there are no specialists and only a few community agencies whose workers are too busy to be of much help, and just about everything devolves on the teacher. Whatever the situation may be, a teacher will find, as talks with parents go on, that all sorts of things will come up that lie far afield from the matter she may have started out to talk about. She is likely to get a pretty intimate picture of family living. As time goes on a good many things are likely to be told in confidence. She will discern many things that are not told in words. As the parents' trust in the teacher grows, help and counsel will often be asked for. The teacher needs to be very alert to what lies within her province to discuss and what does not. Following are some of the things that do not, with suggestions of ways in which a teacher can meet the situation with friendliness and helpfulness but still without overstepping her province.

1. If marital difficulties are spoken of.

A teacher can hardly be *too* watchful about *not* giving advice when told of the parents' difficulties with each other. It may be perfectly apparent that here lies the cause of the child's anxiety, or his apathy and indifference, or his striking out at everything and everybody. The teacher may feel that if the parents could patch up their troubles the child's behavior would straighten out. Probably so, but it is not for a teacher to tell them how to do it. If separation or divorce are mentioned as being considered or pending, a teacher does well to remember that this is the parents' business, whether the merits of the case are town talk or this is the first intimation one has had of trouble. A teacher may be well

aware that such matters are best left alone but may still wonder what to do when they come up.

As one becomes accustomed to talking with parents it becomes easier to listen without being shocked, or showing disapproval or approval; just listening with attention and interest, but with interest that has no element of judging in it. Listening may not be enough. Comment may be needed, but it need not show blame or approval. Perhaps the parent has said that the youngster's difficulty is because he hears so much quarreling at home. Often a teacher can follow along with a noncommittal, questioning sort of comment, "You think it is because of quarreling at home?" Later one may meet the statement, "I guess a divorce is the only answer," with the noncommittal comment, "You feel a divorce will be best?" This sort of comment does not commit the teacher and leaves a parent free to go on thinking aloud.

If there is a school social worker or guidance counsellor, the teacher may want to ask whether the parent would like to talk to that person to get more help than the teacher can give. Perhaps all the teacher can do is to express willingness to be of any possible assistance to the youngster, mentioning that having this information helps in understanding his behavior. The main point here is that the marital difficulties of parents lie outside the teacher's province. They are of concern, of course, because of the effect on the youngster and because of one's friendliness for the parents. If teacher and parents talk of how the parents' difficulties are affecting the child, one needs to be watchful that this, too, is done with no air of blaming or condemning either parent, for that is not the teacher's business. It is only that a situation has been described which throws light on the child's schoolwork and the teacher wants to find how to be most helpful to the youngster.

One cannot be too careful about holding things of this sort in the *strictest confidence*. Sometimes a teacher feels that the counsellor or social worker should know, even though the parent has asked that it not be mentioned to anyone, or has said that the teacher is the only one who knows. She may wonder, too,

whether to tell another teacher who may have a child from the same family; or whether the principal should know, because there are several children in the school and all are known to be having difficulty that this might help to explain. No one can lay down a rule of what should be done, but one would need to consider well the good to be accomplished by telling and what seems the fair, kind, honest thing to do.

2. If situations are revealed that indicate deeply-rooted difficulties.

Often a teacher starts to talk with parents about the youngster's lack of interest, difficulty in getting along with others, or fear and timidity that stands in the way of progress, only to run onto things that make her wonder if there is more to it than was suspected. Perhaps there is a comment that makes it sound as if parents and child are often at cross purposes. Perhaps there is a hint that one parent or the other feels a little resentful that being a parent takes as much time and thought as it does. Maybe some word is dropped which suggests that the mother would like to be back in the business world and free of home cares, or that the father feels that home responsibilities are pretty irksome and that a job on the road would be a great relief. Perhaps there is a comment that suggests dissension and discord at home, though outwardly everything has seemed pleasant enough. Maybe the next interview and the next strengthen the thought that the child's difficulty has deeper roots than have appeared.

A teacher needs to be slow about jumping to the conclusion that what the parent says indicates complete antagonism to the child or rejection either of the child or of parenthood, or that the parent acts as he (or she) does because of a great sense of guilt or fear of failure as a parent, or that the parent is striving to achieve, through the child, success that he (or she) has missed. One may begin to suspect some of these things to be true, but quick and glib diagnosing is something to be avoided. Even when a teacher feels pretty well convinced that things of this sort are the source of the trouble, it is better to just go about giving the

help that a teacher can give without trying to dip into the fields of the psychiatrist or psychologist or social worker or guidance counsellor.

It is well to keep in mind too, that even though one has run onto feelings such as these, they may not necessarily overbalance other more constructive feelings toward the youngster, and fairly satisfactory relationships may still be achieved. This does not mean for a teacher to ignore the negative feelings when they show themselves, for they may be deep-seated and very significant. It is important to recognize them. They may help to explain things one did not understand about the youngster's behavior or his way of feeling about things. They may help to understand the parents' behavior and may give the clue to how to help work things out for the youngster. But it is one thing to recognize the feelings as very significant and another to undertake a course of cure that lies outside the teacher's province.

Having discerned feelings that may be the deep-seated cause of a child's difficulties, a teacher may wonder, what now? One may feel that here is where some psychiatric help would be useful but know, too, that such a suggestion would not be welcome and that making it would only serve to put an end to interviews. If there is specialist help on the staff, the teacher may want to speak to that person about what has come to light, leaving him to use the information as seems best. Often, where there is no specialist, the principal or superintendent or supervisor will be the one to whom to go for help to decide what should be done. Sometimes a teacher just has to leave the matter alone, talking about the surface things as the parent is ready and not delving into the others.

Following are examples of various other matters with deeply-rooted causes that often come to the teacher's attention and that call for ready recognition of what lies within the teacher's province and what does not:

A boy has been taking money from his mother's and sister's pocketbooks but now has more money than can be accounted for

either from that source or from what he earns at an after-school job. The mother is worried and comes to the teacher.

A girl has been saying that she is spending the night with a friend in order to study together and the parents find that the two have been running around the streets instead. The mother of the second girl is on a night job and has supposed the daughter to be at home and in bed.

A boy has been running around with three others whom the mother does not like and he has become insolent and rebellious. The father died recently and the boy feels the loss keenly. The father had been the one to hold firm control and the mother finds all her efforts ineffectual.

Another boy has taken to playing cards for money at the home of a friend and, when the parents remonstrate, he says the friend's parents play with them, so why should they be so fussy.

A girl has become obsessed with the fear of failing in high school and wants to quit school and get a job. She threatens to run away if not allowed to and the parents fear she will, but they feel that she should finish school and are insisting upon it.

Another girl wants to marry, though she has two more years of high school. The parents are considering sending her to her grandparents in the hope of breaking it up, though it will take her out of school.

These and dozens of others that any teacher who talks with the parents can recount are the type of situations which suggest deep-seated difficulties and the need for skillful counselling. The teacher may suggest talking the matter over with the principal if there is no specialist to whom it may be referred. Perhaps help can be secured from a community agency. In the instance of the boy and the theft it was the teacher, principal, minister, and the boy's employer who worked it out, but it took three years' time and infinite patience and understanding. The girl who slipped off with a friend had had good bringing up, and it took only a little while for an understanding teacher to help get her back on the beam. The boy whose father had died got straightened out with the help of a scout leader and the teacher of one of his school

subjects. The boy who started to play cards for money taxed the ingenuity of counsellor, recreational director, and teacher, for no sooner was one cause uncovered than another appeared. The girl who feared failure and wanted to work had cause, but the psychologist and principal had their hands full to convince the parents that she would be better off at work than in school. For the girl who wanted to marry, it was a way of escape from well-meant "bossiness" at home, and it was the worker in a guidance clinic to which the parents were finally persuaded to turn who helped to work the matter out.

A great many situations where specialized help is indicated come to a teacher's attention, not only with older children such as the above but with younger ones as well, for example:

The mother of an eight-year-old told the teacher of impending divorce. She said that they had talked with the child and she had apparently accepted the explanation, but now there is screaming at night and unheard of rebellion in the daytime. It took more than one suggestion before the mother saw that the understanding psychologist might give help that would ease the way for everyone.

The parents of a child who was having great difficulty in school came separately and together to the fourth grade teacher to complain that grades were not being fairly given, that the teacher had favorites and did not give enough help, that school subjects were not being taught properly. It fell within the superintendent's province and not the teacher's to tell of the results of tests and of the prediction that the child had already gone as far in school as he would be able to go and to help them to see that, through the guidance clinic, they might get aid in knowing the next best steps to take.

A second grade child dropped to sleep in school day after day and learning was slow and tedious, with only passing interest in what went on. Nail biting and hair pulling suggested tension and strain of some sort. Finally, after repeated invitations to come in for an interview, the mother came. She explained that the tiredness was probably due to late hours "on account of parties most nights." When asked about the father's interest in school, she said frankly that there was no father around and she "didn't rightly know who he was anyway." Obviously here were matters entirely outside the teacher's province and the specialist's as well. It remained to do what was possible for the child within the hours of the school day.

Out of all the things that come up in interviews, some are very likely to have deep-rooted causes which a teacher can do little about. The things that can be referred to a specialist of course should be. With the others a teacher can give the surface help that is possible, realizing that it is best not to take things apart which one cannot put together again.

3. If it is a health matter.

This is one thing parents will very probably talk to a teacher about; perhaps recent illness, the diet the child should have, health care that has been prescribed, treatment for some physical difficulty, and so on. A teacher needs to be watchful not to be drawn into either diagnosing or prescribing, or into criticizing what has been diagnosed or prescribed by the child's physician.

As far as the school health program is concerned, there may or may not be a school nurse, either full-time or part-time, but there is likely to be a school physician on call. At any rate a teacher usually has little if any responsibility for setting up the school health program. Perhaps she is in a school where the nurse can always be reached, and where any child who is hurt in any way or who shows even a slight indication of illness is supposed to be sent to the nurse at once. Perhaps the nurse is there only part of the time, and when she is not, the teacher must take more responsibility. Maybe in the nurse's absence any difficulty is supposed to be reported to the school physician. Whatever the regulations are they are a protection for the teacher, and she would be wise to observe them without over-stepping.

To a teacher who is very interested in the children, either in the grades or in the high school, it is often a great temptation to try to do something about everything that concerns them. As one talks with the parents it is sometimes so easy to see just how they might do this or that for the betterment of the youngster. This very interest often leads the teacher into trying to straighten out or regulate things that are better left alone, or into giving advice that is better left unspoken. The very fact

of wanting to be helpful suggests being watchful not to wander too far afield. There is plenty to do without getting into areas with which one is not familiar and where one may do more harm than good.

C. If Discussion Would Be Unprofessional

Often things come up in an interview that a teacher feels a little uneasy about discussing and yet does not quite know how to avoid. Maybe adverse comments are made about another teacher, the principal, the superintendent, or another parent and, though the teacher would rather not even listen, she is afraid to shut them off lest the parent be offended. Or perhaps things get a bit on the gossipy side, with information being given that one has no need of knowing about another teacher, other families, or affairs in town. The parent may ask for information that the teacher feels it would be unethical to give, but she does not know how to withhold it without giving offense.

Often it is only passing interest or idle curiosity that occasions the question or remark one wonders about, and it can be passed over lightly and the subject changed. Sometimes it is the parents' way of giving vent to disgruntled feelings, and sometimes it is a bid for the teacher's approval via the route of unfavorable comment on others. Usually the parent is unaware that the matter brought up, the comment made, or the question asked puts the teacher on the spot, and would have had no wish or intention to do so. Often a simple reply, graciously spoken, that one is not in a position to comment is understood and respected and is the natural, easy thing to do. In any case, the following are a few suggestions teachers have found useful in different situations.

1. If adverse comments are made.

Some of these are likely to be lightly spoken, sort of dropped in passing, for example: the principal never seems to have time to speak in the hall; the superintendent certainly is not as

friendly as the previous one; the teacher the child had last year never did make him work and never could explain things so he understood them; the mother of that child with red hair ought not to have a child, she doesn't know how to raise him; those children in this grade that live in the next block are a bunch of hoodlums; and so on. Remarks such as these usually call for little comment. They are likely to be tossed off for what they are worth as the parent speaks of other things. Even though a teacher may let them pass they do give a clue to the parent's feelings—feelings of criticism, fault finding, mild irritation. Perhaps the teacher will catch a glimpse of longing for more recognition, for reassurance, for approval.

Sensing the need, one can speak approval more often, more frequently mention bits of home bringing-up that show observable good results at school, perhaps arrange for casual contact with the principal or with other parents, making the meeting easy through mention of some common interest. A teacher is sure to find it handy to pick up individual interests and have them on tap when needed for casual meetings of this sort. Often a parent will discover that the principal or superintendent or another parent has the same interest in an iris hobby, color photography, stamp collection, or the like, starting off an easy natural relationship.

Often, adverse comments are more seriously spoken than in the above instance; offered more in the nature of considered complaint, with finger placed on definitely resented incidents. There may be frequent interruptions of the recountal to ask, "Wouldn't you have felt the same way?" "Now do you blame me for that?" "What would you have done in a case like that?" "Do you think I was right?" These suggest again the parent's eagerness for approval, the need for reassurance, and the anxiety lest the teacher have some reservation about the part the parent played. A teacher does well to be very watchful of any comments she may make. She would not want to say anything that could ever be construed as being less than fully loyal to principal and superin-

tendent, entirely fair and loyal to fellow-teachers, and perfectly professional as far as other parents are concerned. Well-meant comments, when repeated, do not always sound as one meant them to sound when they were spoken.

Sometimes one can reply with a general noncommittal statement, meeting the question, "Wouldn't you have felt the same way?" with something to the effect that, "Of course no two people feel the same way in a situation"; or maybe answering, "Now do you blame me for that?" with something like, "I know you must have done what you felt was best." Direct questions, such as, "What would you have done in a case like that?" or "Do you think I was right?" can be met with a very honest statement, such as, "I do not know enough about it to say," or "I would not be able to say," or "You are the only one who can decide whether you were right."

Often a teacher can be ready with an incident of the superintendent's thoughtfulness when the complaint is about his being too hurried to ever listen to what one has to say; or of the principal's staying late to help a group of students in something they wanted to do if he is being pictured as lacking interest in what goes on; or of a fellow teacher's generosity in taking on extra duties when another had to be away. Of course, this is assuming that the incidents recounted did happen. Usually one can find plenty to speak of on the positive side. Frequently a constructive note dropped into the conversation will turn the tide of complaint. If, as sometimes happens, however, it seems only to arouse more determination to justify the complaint, then the teacher had better do something else. Sometimes one can voice confidence that the person in question must have had some good reason for what was done. Sometimes it seems best to say simply and directly that one would rather not discuss what another has done. A parent may be momentarily annoyed with this, but he will usually respect a teacher who speaks honestly and forthrightly about feeling that it is not being fair and loyal to fellow workers or to other parents to discuss them when they are not

present. Sometimes one can suggest going together to the person about whom the complaint is made and talking it over. Often this will not be received with much favor, but does put a stop to the complaining.

A teacher can head off adverse comments and criticism, when there seems to be no point in discussing them, and can still be gracious, pleasant, and genuinely friendly. There is no use in being irritated by it, and nothing is ever gained by being rude. Sometimes a teacher needs to be watchful not to be drawn into an apparent assent to the criticism by overlong listening, or into unwise comment because of feeling flattered at being told this or that confidentially or being assured that "You are the only one I could talk to about it."

The latter statement, however, is not always flattery; sometimes it is literally true. A parent may come with some adverse situation to relate which genuinely needs to be given consideration and may be honestly seeking advice about what it is best to do. Perhaps the child has two or three teachers and there is one with whom there is continuous difficulty. The parent has tried to talk to the teacher and got nowhere. The parent has gone to the principal and got no satisfaction. Now the teacher in whom both parent and child have confidence is being told of the situation and asked for advice. Or it may be the end of the year and the parent may be troubled because the child will have to go to a teacher who the parent feels, from what has been heard, would not understand the youngster. The parent wonders whether to go to the principal or the superintendent about it, or whether to wait and see what happens.

Adverse comments coming up in situations such as these are vastly different from those previously mentioned. Here teacher and parent can center thought on the youngster and talk in terms of what is best for him. Even so, the teacher may want to avoid committing herself on the details about a fellow worker. Usually the less adverse comment a teacher has to listen or reply to the better.

2. If gossip information is given.

This is in the nature of loose talk; the passing on of information that may be true in whole or in part or may be largely speculation; that is likely to be little of one's business anyway; that may be told for the sake of a laugh, or to show how one is "in on the know," or with a slight tinge of venom, or more often just told to be telling. As a teacher and parents get acquainted, it becomes easier and easier for this kind of thing to creep in, with both teacher and parents passing along juicy bits. "Did you hear that the X——'s are about to sell their house and buy a bigger one? Where do you suppose they get the money for that? Probably want to get into a better neighborhood, now that Joan is big enough to date." Or, "Did you know about Miss J—— (another teacher) going out with that new man in town? Someone saw them in —— . I guess they thought no one would see them over there. I hear he's married but I don't know." (The man turns out to be the husband of an old friend in town briefly, and all is well.) Or, "Someone said the R——'s have a handful with that boy. They say he is running with bad company. Well, his father did the same thing. What do you expect?" Or, "I wouldn't want you to repeat this, but I hear the F——'s are going to separate and I thought you ought to know it in case Jimmie is upset. Have you noticed anything?" Or, "Believe it or not, the B——'s are having another baby. It's all right if they want to, but it seems to me she has about enough to do. Never goes anywhere any more; hasn't been to a dance for two years, maybe more." Or, "Did you know the superintendent was in —— last week. They say he is getting more money over there, do you know?" Any teacher can add indefinitely to the list; some things told confidentially, some told in the hope of eliciting more information, some just told by way of conversation.

Often a teacher does not want to let an interview become gossip, but the information may be interesting. It may have enough

to it to throw light on something the teacher has wondered about. Or it may be she does not know how to stop it. Always the teacher can be watchful not to be the one to lead the way in loose talk. Usually, when the parent does it, a teacher's non-committal, "Oh, no, I hadn't heard that," "I wouldn't know about that," "Is that so," and the like are not very encouraging to further offerings, and soon she can turn the subject to what the interview was originally intended to accomplish.

Sometimes the teacher can give exact information to meet the speculation—"Yes, that was Miss J——'s friend's husband. Her friend called her to say he would be here," or "Yes, Mrs. B—— told me how happy they are about the new baby. They both love children so much"—going on then to change the subject. One may voice confidence that the boy said to be running with bad company will come out all right, or that the superintendent will announce it later if he plans to change positions, and then on to more fruitful topics.

Often gossip comes up because the interview is really over but has not been ended, and the parent feels called upon to talk about something. Sometimes a teacher does not take the lead in bringing up things to be talked about and conversation drifts in a desultory fashion, from not much of anything to nothing much. If the teacher has initiated the interview, a good way to prevent gossip in the first place is to have points in mind to talk about and to keep on the track; not being abrupt, but quietly keeping conversation on or close to the subject and stopping the interview before it peters out. If the parent has asked for the interview, it was for some particular purpose. Again, the teacher can keep conversation on the subject, even though she lets the parent do most of the talking.

3. If information is asked for that should not be given.

The parent may ask about how some other child is getting on in school now, or what kind of grades so and so is making, or whether another one is doing better in arithmetic, or whether

another is likely to make the honor roll. A teacher is fortunate who can say, in reply to questions such as these, that it is the school's policy to give information on a child's schoolwork only to the child and his parents. If there is no such established policy, a teacher can still explain that the parent will readily understand that it seems best not to give information on other children's work.

Often a parent will ask for further information about some incident, concerning another child, which the children all know about and have reported at home: Is it true that so-and-so was the one taking the children's lunch money and what was done about it? Does the teacher know that all the children are aware that so-and-so lies to her at every turn, and if she does know why doesn't she put a stop to it? Has the school ever taken any steps about so-and-so, who comes to school with big bruises from being beaten at home? It may very well be genuine interest in the well-being of the youngster in question and in the good of the school, rather than curiosity, which prompts the question. Yet the teacher may and probably does feel that, for the protection of the child concerned, the fewer who know details of the situation the better. The questioning parent can be assured of the teacher's interest in the child and of the school's concern and further assured that the matter is being taken care of in the way that seems best for the youngster. One may want to mention that the parent's own child can be a big help among the other children in suggesting that the matter not be talked about.

Whether the questions be about marks, or about some child's ability in reading, or about another's popularity or lack of it with the other children, or about the chances of this or that one being chosen May Queen, or what not, a teacher does well to avoid giving personal information or being led into making comparisons that can cause any parent or child to feel that confidence has been or may be betrayed, or that individual privacy and reserve have been violated, or that the teacher is playing favorites or currying favor with some parents by letting them know of matters not generally discussed.

Sometimes parents will ask about some matter which it is school policy for the teachers not to discuss. Maybe it is test results that are wanted, and any discussion of these should be with the psychologist, principal, or whoever is assigned that responsibility. It is easy enough to explain this to the parents and to refer them to the proper person. One needs to guard against the temptation to give what may seem like harmless little fragments of the information wanted. It is better to leave it to the person who is supposed to do it. If it is a school where the teacher is expected to discuss certain test results with the parents, that is a different matter than the casual request for information referred to here, and it is assumed that the teacher would have the necessary preparation and instructions for interpreting the test results. Maybe it is information on promotion probabilities that is wanted, and it is the policy for such information to be given only by the principal. Perhaps the parent wants to talk over recommendations that the school physician has made, but, according to school policy, these are supposed to be discussed only by the nurse.

It is natural that parents should turn to their child's teacher for any information they want. The teacher is the person to whom they are likely to feel the closest. They may not know which other person to go to for this information or that. The teacher may have the information asked for and might like to give it. Perhaps there is the feeling that it would be better if it could be given by the teacher, instead of sending the parent to first one person, then another. If the teacher's feeling is anything less than wholehearted support of the school policy, she should be watchful not to let this feeling show in the tone of her voice. Her tone may tell the parents that she thinks it is a cockeyed policy, even though her words say only that the parent should see some particular person for that information. A teacher can do more in an interview than she may realize to build good will for the school and good feeling toward the administration and other teachers.

There will always be plenty of things to wonder about as

teachers and parents talk together. The teacher is likely to go on wondering whether she should say this or whether it would have been better not to say that; to wish that one had thought of this point before the interview instead of after; to hope that the parent really understood what was said just as it was meant. Probably it is a good thing *not* to be dead sure that one knows just how to do it but to feel one's way in each interview, saying and doing the things that seem to make for good feeling, that seem to be helpful, that seem to be natural and friendly and fair and honest, and that seem to fit the parents with whom one is talking.

11. Some interviews—What was discussed

A TEACHER IS LIKELY TO WONDER SOMETIMES just what combination of all the things that might be talked about with the different parents will really get into the interviews with them. It is natural, too, to wonder what the interviews that other teachers have had have turned out to be. That is something that a teacher is not likely to find out easily, because of the need for holding the things that are discussed in confidence. The more important things are, the less can be told about them. Often one will chat with a neighboring teacher about the time of an interview, the place it was held, or whether notes were taken as it went on, but when it comes to the specific things that were talked about, little can be told. So, in order to give the look-in which probably cannot be had to any great extent in one's own school, the story is told here of what teachers and parents in different places have talked about together. It is not the purpose to analyze the interviews, or even to describe in detail what went on; only to give an idea of what was talked about.

A. With Parents of Children Eight-Years Old and Under

1. Angie (5 years), Kindergarten in Public School.

The interview was at school at the mother's telephoned request after Angie had been in Kindergarten for about two months. The mother said she wanted to get some help about Angie's messy eating, which bothered her no end, and she wondered if the teacher could tell her what you can do with a child who uses her fingers instead of a fork and throws food around. Without waiting for a reply, she went on to say that the messy eating is bad enough but not so bad as the fussing at the table, because Angie and her sister ($3\frac{1}{2}$) want to talk, which interrupts the father and mother's conversation. This led her to tell of the father's irritation at having the children at his heels whenever he is home, and of the way he hushes up their constant chatter. The mother spoke of thinking it might be a good idea to get a swing and jungle gym for the big back yard as a means of keeping the children out of their father's way, except that this would attract neighborhood children and add to the mother's trouble. She said that the children have few toys, because she believes that if they have too many at once, they will tire of them.

The mother showed little interest in hearing about Angie's doings at school, though she looked at the toys and asked where to get the ones that the teacher said Angie particularly liked. The teacher turned the conversation back to the eating habits which the mother had first mentioned, but since there seemed little interest in discussing it, she concluded that it was probably only the springboard for coming in to talk. As the mother got up to leave, she said the interview had been a great help and that she appreciated the teacher's willingness to talk with her. In reply to the invitation to come again, she said she would because she knew that she needed help.

216 SOME INTERVIEWS—WHAT WAS DISCUSSED

The help that the teacher gave at this first interview was largely attentive listening, but the mother evidently felt her friendliness and interest and the way was left open for other interviews, where more help perhaps could be given. The teacher soon realized that the mother needed an opportunity to put her thoughts into words, and as she did so it became increasingly apparent that the parent-child relationships were of far greater moment than the messy eating. However, the first step was for the mother to begin to get her feelings into the open, and this was what happened.

2. Carlotta (4) and Karlene (3), Nursery School in a Child Care Center.

The father came to school for the first of the regular monthly interviews that are the custom at this center. The mother had come for the registration interview. The father began speaking at once of his two big problems: his wife's interning in the hospital and the family's limited finances. He is a lawyer just getting established. The mother's interning throws the major care of the two children on the father. It hurries him to get them to the Child Care Center by 9:30 and himself to the office at 10:00, then to pick them up again at 4:30 and get the necessary things done at home by the time the mother gets there for supper on her few hours off duty.

The father said that by the time supper work is done he is tired and wants to look at television, and unless the children will look at it, too, what can a man do with them? In his own country (China) there were servants. Here there are no servants and little money, and it will be one year more until his wife can get a residence job at the hospital. Then their finances will be better, but with more money they will have to move from the housing project where they now live. He asked if it would be possible to come in to talk things over once a week instead of once a month, because of all the things about taking care of the children with which he would like help. The teacher said that she would

be glad to have him come. She asked whether leaving the children at the Center a half-hour longer in the afternoon would help. He said that it would give him time to do his marketing and that he could do it faster without them along. So it was arranged that they would stay until 5:00 or 5:15. Laundry had been mentioned as one of his big problems, so the teacher spoke of a family that was moving and would sell a washing machine cheap. The father said that he could afford the price mentioned and that it would save time if he did not have to wait in line for the use of the laundry equipment in the housing project.

With some of these things off his mind for the moment, the father asked if his little girls were being good. The teacher assured him that they were and took him to the room where they were busy playing in the playhouse corner. She showed him some painting Carlotta had done that day and told him about Karlene's joy over her first trip down the slide. And she said that she thought he was doing a good job in taking care of the children and keeping his own work and the household going while his wife finished her professional training. He spoke with pride of his wife's work and, as he left with the girls, said, "You will see. We will make it go."

Often it is just such practical help and encouragement as this teacher gave that parents need and want. They may be going right about working out their problems, as were this father and mother, and are not asking that anyone should take on the problem for them, but to find a teacher who can see the problem and come up with a practical suggestion here and there can be a big help. And a word of encouragement often does more than one can ever guess.

3. David (3½), Nursery School in Private School.

The nursery school teacher accepted an invitation to see David at home. Arriving about an hour before dinner, as had been suggested, she saw his room and his toys, visited his backyard play space, and saw the garden. She discovered then that she and the

father were both iris enthusiasts. David showed his own corner of the garden where he had irises "just like Daddy's" and some lettuce and carrots for his two white rabbits. It was David who took his teacher to see the ten-month-old baby and then he, Mother, Daddy, and the teacher had dinner together. When bedtime, with its usual story, prayers, and goodnights, was over, teacher and parents sat down for a visit.

Both David and the ten-month-old baby are adopted and the plans for adopting two more children were uppermost in mind and were the chief topic of conversation. The parents asked what the teacher thought about spanking and the pros and cons were discussed. The matter of thumb sucking came up, and this bothers the parents, though they try not to let it do so. The mother had not been able to get to school much because of the baby. Dad drops David as he goes to work and often stops to watch the children playing. The mother was interested in hearing all about the school doings and particularly about David's great interest in the other children. She said that she had been a very lonely child and that, above all else, she wanted her children to have the joy of companionship with other children and to know how to get along with them. The teacher suggested that maybe the mother could come to spend part of a day and could bring the baby with her; that it would be nice for the children to have the baby there. It was arranged that she would do so the next week.

Going to the home, as this teacher did, gives an opportunity to get a picture of the child that it would be hard to get in any other way. It is natural that, when one is a part of the homey doings, all sorts of little things should come to attention that would never come up at school. Often a teacher finds that the home interview is such a good way for getting acquainted that it is well worth all the personal time it takes.

4. Terry and Merry (4½), twins, Kindergarten, Private School.

The father and mother of the twins came to talk with the teacher about the temper tantrums that both of the children

have. When one starts in on a tantrum the other follows, so that they always have them together. The father told of bringing them out of it by "flicking a willow stick on their legs," but he said that the mother "doesn't believe in the stick but doesn't do anything in place of it." The boy sucks two fingers and the girl her thumb. The father said that one evening a relative told the twins the gory details of jaws deformed by thumb and finger sucking. The father thought that would stop it, but, according to the account, the children went to bed crying and continued to suck. They are "crazy about school" and the worst threat the parents can give is that they will have to stay at home. The father said that they have no idea what causes the tantrums unless it could be the weather, or maybe that one twin bothers the other. The mother said she thought it might be because the father yells at them so much, and he replied that someone has to yell because the mother is too easy on them.

The teacher raised the question of whether it might not make them dislike school to use it as a threat, and the mother agreed that it might. The father discounted the idea because, "They know we won't make them stay home, we are only too glad to have them go." The teacher suggested that maybe they could watch the tantrums for a while to see if they could figure out what seemed to bring them on, which would be a help in knowing what to do about them. The mother said that she would be glad to do it, but the father said he doubted whether he would do much watching; that he would be "more likely to get the stick and get busy." Anyway they agreed that they would come back later to talk it over again. Neither parent asked whether the twins had tantrums at school and the teacher did not volunteer the information that they have not had any there thus far. As a matter of fact, they did not ask anything about the children's doings at school. Their sole concern was about the home tantrums which, as the father said, "keep us upset all the time." The teacher spoke of some of the things the children liked to do, but the parents said they must be going.

Probably this teacher wondered what she might hear if she

could talk alone with each parent, since there seemed to be some difference of viewpoint and the mother, on the whole, did not have much to say. Perhaps later on that would be arranged, but at the moment the teacher probably got more insight into the situation this way than if only one parent had been there. This is an instance where the teacher found it best to just listen. There obviously was little, if any, desire for suggestions. The teacher said later that she felt the most constructive one she could offer, indeed the only one, was to look for the immediate incident bringing on the tantrum. Then, with specific incidents as a starter for discussion, they might go on perhaps to a little insight into how the children were feeling.

5. Lenny (3½), Nursery School in a Private School.

This child had been in nursery school for two weeks when the father came to talk with the teacher about whether he might stay. The parents had been asked to take him out of another nursery school because of alleged retardation, and they were greatly worried that he might not stay in this one. The teacher, who had been glad to make the trial to see whether it would work out for Lenny and for the other children, explained that tests were being delayed until he felt at home. She said that so far he was having a good time and the other children were paying no special attention to him. The teacher and father talked over the things Lenny is able to do and compared notes on progress at home and at school. Toilet responsibility was showing improvement, eating was less messy at both places, and the use of several words had been noted. Prior to this there had been very little speech. The father was concerned about Lenny's still wanting the "sleep-safe" which had been put on him at night as a baby. He was greatly relieved when the teacher suggested that he be allowed to wear it until he discarded it willingly, especially since he was having school adjustments to make and there was no special hurry about adjusting to doing without the "sleep-safe."

The father and mother are both employed. An aunt lives in the upper part of the duplex and cares for Lenny when he is not in school. Grandfather lives nearby. All are said to be relaxed and easy-going with Lenny. The father spoke of the family's appreciation of the willingness to take Lenny in this nursery school and asked if the teacher would come to see the child at home. She agreed to do so on a weekend or evening, when the mother would be there.

This may be one of the instances where a hasty and inaccurate diagnosis had been made. Or it may be found that the child is retarded and perhaps does need to be in a special school. It may fall to the teacher, eventually, to talk with the parents about this, considering with them what will be the best thing for the child. If so, the fact that there has been the willingness to give the youngster a chance will give them confidence in her interest and fairness and integrity and will be a good basis for later interviews.

6. Timmy (5), Kindergarten, Public School.

The interview was with the mother, who is divorced from the father. She and the child live with her mother and stepfather. She began at once to speak of the conflict and tension in the home and of her desire to get a place of her own as soon as she can finish the college work which she is doing and get a position as a teacher. She had left the father and had gone back home when Timmy was two months old. She told how she appreciated the willingness of her mother and stepfather to take them in. She said that she hoped that she and the child were not adding to the tension, that she tried not to impose, and that the mother and stepfather are fond of Timmy. Her ex-husband saw her recently and said that he would like to have her back but that he never wants to see the child. She said that that, of course, had settled the matter and that she would not even consider going back. She has said very little to Timmy about his father, and the child has never seen him. She was very interested in hearing all about the child's school doings, and asked especially about his interest in

music. She wanted to know whether the teacher felt that he was much upset by the home situation, and seemed greatly pleased when the teacher said that in school he seemed happy with the other children, interested in all that was going on, not easily upset, and quite able to hold his own without picking a fuss. She asked for any suggestions the teacher could give that would help her with Timmy. The teacher asked about his home playthings, spoke of his marked interest in working with tools, and wondered if there would be any opportunity for a work-bench. The mother said that her stepfather likes to work with his hands and that she believed he would be interested in fixing up a work-bench. She said that she would talk to him about it.

In an interview such as this a teacher will quickly see that suggestions that will help the child will be welcomed. Probably she would feel quite free to get in touch with the mother to talk over anything that might come up, knowing that there is a basic interest in the child's well-being and a real desire for suggestions.

7. Lloyd (5), Kindergarten, Public School.

The teacher had met Lloyd's parents at the first PTA meeting of the year, and, during a chat, they invited her to drop by their home some evening. Two weeks later she did this by appointment. Both the mother and father are teachers, but the mother's hours are such that she can be at home when Lloyd gets there. Both said that they wanted to talk about his schoolwork, but not until he went to bed. Before that the time was his. He showed the teacher his dog, rabbit, pigeons, fish, and white rat. After he went to bed, giving up the usual story by previous agreement, the parents asked about his school. They were concerned principally to know about his relationships with other children, because they felt that this is more important than anything that comes out of books. They told of reading to him a great deal and of their hope that he will be an avid reader and will have a flair for music. Both said that there is no intention of deciding for him what he will take up as his line of work.

The teacher told of the youngster's interest in painting, in building with the blocks, in working with wood, in looking at the books on the library table, and, above all, in doing all of these things when other children are doing them too. She spoke of how he is always coming up with ideas of things to do and of how the other children follow his lead. She mentioned noticing now and then that it is hard for him to let other children take the lead and told of often suggesting that he listen to what this child or that has to say, or that he help in some group enterprise that another has started. Then she said that she would be interested in knowing how they had brought the youngster up; that he is a very nice little fellow, and that it is always of interest to know how it came about. Of course the parents were glad enough to do it. Who wouldn't be! When the teacher got up to leave, the father said he "could go on all night talking about that kid."

This is an example of an interview where there is no special "problem" but where there is still a great amount to talk about. One can just imagine how interesting and helpful it can be for a teacher to hear how parents have brought up a child like Lloyd and how much give and take of discussion there would be as the recountal goes on.

8. Kathy (6), First Grade, Public School.

Kathy's mother died when she was four and her brother five. For a few months an aunt and uncle lived in the home, then they left and the maternal grandmother came and looked after things until she died. Now the father and two children are alone. He is an auto mechanic and says that he "can make out all right caring for the children" and that they want to be together. He spoke almost at once about remarrying soon and said that he can count on the girl being good to the children. He came to school for the interview, taking time off from work to do so. He was interested in going around to see the building and especially interested in seeing all of Kathy's work that the teacher showed him and

in hearing about her progress. He talked a great deal about the kind of girl that he wants Kathy to be, spoke of how important religion is in bringing up children, then came back to the subject of his remarriage and asked the teacher what effect she thought it would have on Kathy.

In reply to the teacher's question as to whether Kathy had been told, he said that he had told the children a few days before and that Kathy had said it would be nice to have a mother, but the boy, who is seven, had had little to say. He mentioned, too, that he had talked to his minister about the proposed marriage, but he did not repeat what was said and the teacher did not ask.

The father said there had been trouble with the boy, who has been running around town and not coming home for supper until late, and is belligerent about any correction. The father expects trouble with him when there is a stepmother. Knowing that there had been trouble with the boy in school, the teacher asked if the father had talked to the boy's teacher. He said that he had but did not get much satisfaction, so she suggested that maybe he would like to talk with the principal. He said he guessed he would. A few minutes later the principal stopped by with a message and the teacher asked him to join them, which he did. Since the child was not in her room, the teacher explained the situation and then excused herself so that the father and principal could talk by themselves. When she returned to the room, the principal, through a comment, brought her into the conversation, which turned again to Kathy. The father asked if Kathy had said anything at school about having a new mother, and when the teacher said that she had not, he said he wished she would talk to Kathy and see what she would say. The teacher told him that she often talked with different children alone and that she would be glad to have a talk with Kathy, but that she would not want to try to push the child to speaking of the prospect of a new mother. She said that if Kathy did not speak of it naturally this time, then perhaps she would another time. It was decided that the father would come back in a week or so to see

the principal about the boy and that he would drop in to speak with Kathy's teacher.

In commenting on this interview later, the teacher said she felt there was not much she could do but listen and be interested and stick to discussing Kathy, because she realized that the father's remarriage was entirely out of her province even for comment. She had heard the town gossip that the girl was no one to be taking on two children, and it was easy to see that the father wanted reassurance and that he was not fully satisfied that even Kathy was accepting the idea of a new mother. This is one of the instances where, although a teacher wants to do all possible for the child, still it has to be hands off in a family situation which is not her business, even though she knows that it will affect the child one way or another.

9. Jenny (8), Third Grade, Public School.

The parents came to the school by appointment. The father was voluble and talkative, the mother shy and quiet. The talk together was principally about Jenny's schoolwork, in which the father particularly is very much interested. He said that he had had little education himself and that he wants all of his children to get to college. He spoke of being very proud of Jenny's reading and said that he has her read to him every evening. It is comic books now she wants to read most and he doesn't think much of them for reading. However, he said, "That's what she wants so we read them." He spoke of his concern that she does not seem to be much of a speller and that all of her writing is printing. The teacher explained that work in spelling was just beginning and told why manuscript writing is taught. She mentioned that a great deal of informal spelling has been going on for some time but that now there would be more and more of the drill which the father said he had when he learned to spell. He said he guessed it was a good idea not to make so much fuss about it as they used to. There was talk, too, about Jenny's draw-

ing, which is mostly of cowboys. Then the mother spoke up, saying that the drawing and the comics interfered with helping with the cooking and ironing and that she has to keep after Jenny to sew on her buttons and to wash the dishes, but that those things are just as important as school and that it was time the child should be learning to do things in the house. The father said, "She can do both." The teacher spoke of her interest in hearing about Jenny's home doings and of what she liked to do besides play cowboy. The mother told about the chores that she insisted must be done before there could be any play: making her own bed, wiping the dishes, bringing in the eggs, setting the table. The father laughed and said, "But she's a cowboy all the time she does those things and her mother's always after her to be a lady." Then the mother said that she had had to work hard always and didn't have much bringing up and that she wants her girl to learn to do things right.

Here were two parents, each wanting in a different way the best that could be had for their Jenny, and only by listening quietly and letting them feel her interest and respect and understanding could the teacher ever hope to even glimpse the depth of the feeling about it. Yet, how it would help in working with that child to know the way the parents looked at things.

10. Joseph (7), First Grade, Public School.

The interview was with an aunt who spoke only Spanish, so an interpreter was necessary. The child had come to school for the first time. After taking the usual registration information in the office, the principal had brought the aunt in to talk with the teacher. The father works in the mines in another state, the mother is in a T.B. sanitarium, and Joseph has been in the care of this aunt and the grandparents since he was a few weeks old. He has seen his father only a few times and his mother not at all. He has lived far away from towns and knows nothing, the interpreter said, of shows, comic books, or "anything of the world, but much of the hills and streams." The grandfather has taught

him the lore of the woods. They hunt and fish together and Joe helps drive the wagon and bring in wood. He has been looking forward to going to school, for they have told him that reading will open the world to him. Neither of the grandparents can read and the aunt only a little, but they "have taught Joe education is for him." School now will be his first experience with children or with any regularly scheduled living, since he has been free to roam when and as he pleased. The school bus stops at a crossroads four miles from where the family lives and he will be taken there in the morning and picked up there at night. The teacher told the aunt what she could about the school and something of what Joe would find there and asked her to come to visit, but the aunt said, "Joe yes, me no." She was very interested in seeing the books and looked through them carefully, then asked about the arithmetic and writing. The teacher did not try to explain how it was taught but assured her that the children were helped to learn both numbers and writing. The aunt shook her head when she saw the play corner and the sand table and puzzles and paints and, through the interpreter, said that Joe is not in school for play. The teacher explained the play as part of the learning, and the aunt left saying, "Joe will learn. He will go far in school."

In the interview the thing that seemed most needed was for the aunt to go away feeling sure that the high hopes she and the grandparents held for school for Joe were going to be fulfilled; that he was in safe hands. It was no time for a teacher to try to explain the methods of teaching but only to assure the aunt that it was a place where learning could go on. And how that teacher must have hoped that she would have the understanding to make school a happy experience to that child, who was coming into a world wholly unknown to him and coming to it with the thought of its being a wonder world of education. How fortunate the teacher must have felt to have had the opportunity for that interview. How else could she ever have hoped to understand that child?

11. Robert (6), Second Grade, Private School.

The teacher had asked the parents to come in to talk about the child's schoolwork, hoping to discover the reason for his inattentiveness and why he rarely ate any lunch in the cafeteria and seemed sleepy in the morning. Before the time set for the appointment the mother telephoned to say that she was not well and to ask the teacher to come to the home. The teacher went immediately after school in the afternoon. The father had come home from the office early in order to be present for the interview. Robert kept coming in and out in spite of his mother's repeated admonitions to go and play. The talks started off about his school work and the mother said that he pestered her so to go to school that she started him at five, even though there was no kindergarten, and that he loved it. He volunteered, "I passed to second grade and do as good as anyone." The teacher agreed that he did well and decided that it was not the time to speak of the inattention. On the matter of eating the mother thought that they would have him come home for lunch, since they have their big meal at noon and it is handier to have him home where she says there is no trouble about eating. About the sleepiness both parents said that they knew he had been up too late, but the home is small and, since he sleeps on the couch in the living room, when there is company he is up late and nothing can be done about it. As they talked, though, they said they had not thought of it before but that he could be put to bed in the bedroom and moved later. The father said maybe they could have company on Friday and Saturday evenings, that he had not realized that it would interfere with schoolwork. He said it had not occurred to him that Robert was far enough along in school for it to make much difference. The teacher spoke of the early grades being very important as the time when work habits have their beginnings and how the attitude of taking school seriously, if it begins there, can carry right on through the grades. Since Robert was clamoring for attention most of the time, the teacher suggested that he

tell about different things that had been going on at school and he got very interested in the recounts. The teacher told some things and Robert told some, and when the father said, "Why didn't you ever tell us about all this?" the mother said, "You know well enough you never give him a chance."

Before the teacher left she had a pretty clear picture of a home where there was no lack of love for the youngster but where he was not taken very seriously nor his school looked upon as being of any great importance. It was more a matter of thoughtlessness than anything else, the teacher decided, with plenty of interest and willingness to build on. She told of going away wondering if she could possibly have had as clear a picture as she did had she not been in the home to get the feel of it with the child there.

12. Michael (7), Second Grade, Public School.

The father and mother came to school for the interview and as they came in the father said that they wanted to hear everything the kid is doing, good and bad, but mostly good. They talked about all of his schoolwork, the teacher telling of the things enjoyed at school, showing his workbooks and some of his paintings, telling about how he is always saying, "Let's do thus and so," and how the children follow his lead. Again and again she said, "But tell me about him at home now" and each time the father would say, "Yes, yes, later on, but we want to hear about what cooks here." Finally he did say, "Now for home," and told how Michael is up before anyone else and "raring to go," how he "has more ideas than he can keep up with," how he and the boy plan in the morning what they will do when school is over (Father is a YMCA secretary), and how they swim and fish and play ball together and Mike helps around the Y. The mother had little to say except that at supper "conversation usually runs wild about Hopalong Cassidy, but he eats well and we enjoy his talk." There are two younger children, and the father said, "We adore them all." The mother said they live in an easy-going way "because you can't regiment children without fussing, and

we don't fuss." The father asked if the boy wastes time at school and wondered if he might need more to do. The teacher agreed that maybe was so, though he always finds things to do when he gets his work done, which he does very quickly. It was agreed that the teacher would provide some extra work for him, since the father feels that "he needs pinning down some." He said that it was his idea that the extra work needs to be something that has to be done rather than what he thinks up for himself, since he does plenty of that. Both he and the mother spoke of wanting him to learn that, with all of his initiative, there are things which must be done. "With their easy-going way of living," he said, "it is all the more important for Mike to get some of the holding down he needs at school." He went on to say, though, that even though they are easy-going, "Mike doesn't get away with things and never has."

This was an instance where the teacher was glad enough to have the parents' suggestions, realizing that they had given real thought to what was best for the youngster. Many times a teacher can get just as many good suggestions from the parents as they can get from the teacher.

B. With Parents of Children 9 through 12

13. Maxine (9), Fourth Grade, Private School.

School had been going on for about six months when this interview took place. There had been several before and the teacher had been to the home once. The first interview had been immediately after school opened, when the parents said that there had been trouble with Maxine for more than a year and that they would do anything possible to cooperate with the teacher. She has never liked school and fusses about coming, and getting any homework done is always a battle. In the interview reported here the parents said that they felt that considerable improvement was evident in Maxine's attitude. Fussing about

school has diminished and homework has been done voluntarily twice.

The father has a great ambition for Maxine and her sister (11 years) to go to college, and from the first day of school in first grade it has been talked about. A year ago he got college catalogs so that they could begin to decide where to go. This had been spoken of when the teacher visited the home and the catalogs had been shown. Later the teacher asked whether they had thought of the possibility that Maxine felt pushed about college and so resented school altogether. This was just dropped into the conversation as a question and at a later interview the mother brought it up, saying she believed that there might be some connection. The father said he couldn't agree; that children must be pushed to have ambition. At the interview reported here he said he still didn't agree but that there might be something to it and that he had thrown the catalogs away, adding that they would be out of date soon anyway. The teacher told of raising the question, in one of the discussion periods, of what the children wanted to be when they grew up. She mentioned the great variety of things the children told of: being a ballet dancer, nurse, teacher, movie actor, band leader, marine, and the like. She spoke of how ambitions change as the children grow. The father said, "You're telling me I've got the 'bridle on the tail," and they all laughed together and agreed that they would see how things went along and talk about it again.

That teacher understood well enough that the father could not be pushed any more than Maxine. It is a wise teacher who can bide her time; who can be content to drop in a suggestion and then leave it alone. It is never necessary to do everything at one interview. One can't, anyway.

14. Stanley (11), Fourth Grade, Public School.

The teacher went for the interview to the small café which the mother owns and runs, since she could not leave it. The

teacher had talked with the mother twice before. This time he came because Stanley had been doing very poor schoolwork, had been showing little interest, and was always in trouble with other children. On two days he had been absent and the teacher wondered if the mother knew it. The school is a small one in a small rural town and there is no visiting teacher, social worker, or psychologist. Each teacher does whatever is done herself, with such help as the superintendent has time to give.

The mother had been very reticent in previous talks, and the teacher felt that he had been able to get hold of very little to work on. This time, however, she was so disturbed by the absences, of which she had not known, that she began to talk more freely. She told how she has been the sole support of the family. She divorced the father when this boy was five and his brother three. There are three step-sisters whom she raised, all of them married and away. There has always been trouble with Stanley, and the mother said that he has been getting out of hand and that she had been able to do very little with him for several weeks. He wants to stop school and earn money. The teacher asked if there was any special reason that he wanted to earn money. She said that he didn't want to take money from her and, when the teacher commented that this showed a fine spirit, the mother said, "No, it is because he is always mad at me." The teacher asked if she knew why and she said, "Oh, I guess it is still that calf." Then she went on to tell that Stanley had always wanted a calf, and that when the children were little she made them save money by telling them if they did they could buy a calf. They did save money but they never got the calf. This boy had always held it against her, saying she cheated them. The teacher had not heard this before and asked if she thought it was too late to still get the calf and if she thought it might help. She said she wouldn't have a calf around, that there was no place for it, and that she could not afford it. The teacher suggested that they both think about what might be done and said that he would drop in the next day after school. He did so, having meanwhile located a calf, just in case. When the teacher came in the mother began to

cry and said she had thought about it and had stayed up the night before until Stanley came in late, and she had told him she would get him a calf. He was so excited that he cried, and she said he kissed her for the first time in two years. As she told the story she said, "You hear the pounding out back? It's him building a shed." At least a first step had been taken, because a teacher cared enough to talk things over.

15. Rita (10), Sixth Grade, Private School.

The interview was at school. The parents came together, but the father had to be at work and could stay only about fifteen minutes. He was especially interested in hearing about Rita's schoolwork and in seeing the art room, the shop, and the gym. They had moved to the city recently and this was Rita's first year at the school and the teacher's first interview with the parents. The Director had taken the registration interview and the teacher had the information from this and the report of the tests that the psychologist had given before admission. From this she knew that there are two sisters, sixteen and eighteen, that the maternal grandparents live in the home, and that both parents were educated abroad and had lived there until they were grown.

When the father had gone the mother said that her greatest interest is in how Rita gets on with other children, that schoolwork is never a problem, that she has always learned fast, but that "she has always been snooty with other children when they are slower than she is." The mother spoke of her feeling that good academic work is of little use unless a girl can get along with others, and that it is this that Rita needs to get from school. This was the whole subject of the talk together. The mother told of experiences at home with the sisters and school experiences in the three different schools where the child has been. She said that in each school the principal and teachers were always especially nice to Rita, because of her attractiveness, her easy way with adults, and her ability to do everything well. Then she told how Rita would suddenly begin complaining of the other children,

and how one after another of the friends she had started to make would drop off until she was pretty much alone among the children. The teacher asked how Rita felt about this and the mother said, "She puts on a high and mighty air before others but at home she cries about it." The teacher and mother talked together about how it had been handled at home, and the teacher suggested that they talk again after she had had a chance to begin to get acquainted with Rita.

Often a teacher needs to do just what this teacher did; wait to get acquainted with the youngster (and the parents and home) before even commenting, much less saying what it might be helpful to do.

16. Roger (11), Fifth Grade, Public School.

The interview was at the mother's request. When she came she was embarrassed and found it difficult to get to the point. The teacher talked along with her about Roger's schoolwork or whatever topic the mother brought up, knowing all along that none of this was what she really wanted to speak of. Finally the teacher said, directly, that she hoped the mother would speak of whatever troubled her. Then it came out. The teacher is also Roger's Sunday School teacher and the den-mother in his Cub Scouts group. Although Roger likes her he says, "It is too much of the same thing," and that he "Can't always have the same woman bossing me." He says that the boys laugh at him because he has the same teacher for everything he does. Fortunately the teacher was an understanding one and, instead of being hurt, was able to talk over with the mother what might be done. One possibility was a change in the Sunday School class, and the teacher had been considering this anyway. The teacher raised the question of moving Roger to the next grade, since his schoolwork was all so easy for him and the principal had considered moving a few children on to relieve crowded conditions. The mother demurred at this and said that she was not asking any special favors "because Roger has to learn to take what there is

to take," but that she felt the teacher should know about it. The teacher thought so too. She said that maybe she had given him too much attention and depended too much on him because of his being so capable, and that she would watch that.

It really took courage for Roger's mother to go to his teacher with a problem such as this, and there must have been a good deal of confidence in the teacher or she could not have done it. When it comes to the give and take of interviews, a teacher needs to be able to listen to suggestions, too, and even to be able to take criticism sometimes. There was no special criticism in this instance, but it would have been very easy to be hurt instead of taking the situation with as much understanding as this teacher did.

17. Verna (12), Seventh Grade, Public School.

The mother dropped by the school just to see if the teacher was free to talk. She said she had nothing on her mind, just wanted the teacher to know how much Verna likes school and how pleased the family is that she is so interested in all of it. There was one year when she was not so happy, and they are all especially glad that is over. The teacher took the mother to the Home Economics room to see some of the things Verna had been doing, since that was mentioned as one of her special interests. Verna is in the middle of seven, the younger ones being eight, five, and one, and the older fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen. The mother told of how willingly Verna takes care of the little ones and how reliable she is. She said that she does not ask her to help much with the housework, since she is busy with school and Scouts and her Sunday School, which they feel is very important. The mother asked if the teacher felt Verna would make high school all right and said that they would never push her "because we think you have to let kids go their own way." The teacher said there was no doubt of her ability to do high school work, and they talked of the good schoolwork she does.

When the parents know that the teacher is interested in know-

ing them and talking with them even though there is no "problem," there can be many interviews such as this one, just a friendly chat. One may question giving time to it when nothing is the matter, but it does seem to be time well spent to have some conversation about things that are going nicely.

18. Jerry (14), Eighth Grade; and Malcolm (12), Sixth Grade; Public School.

It was Malcolm's teacher who came to the home at the beginning of the year for the get-acquainted interview. This is an Indian family living in a very small village and "glad to be away from the town kids who might get the boys to running around evenings." There are two younger children, both girls. The father spent thirteen years away from home in government boarding schools and Malcolm plans to go to government school when he finishes eighth grade. Jerry does not care much about schooling and says the reason Malcolm makes the honor roll and he doesn't is that eighth grade is harder than sixth. The parents say that it is because Jerry doesn't work hard at school or at anything else.

The boys feed the chickens, cut wood, haul water, clean the yard, sell extra eggs, and help around the house. Whenever they do girls' work the mother pays them extra. Both boys spent a year or two with the grandparents, which the parents look upon as good training for them. During the summer the mother takes the children and goes to a cotton ranch, where the boys work and chop cotton to earn money for clothes and extras. It is not necessary to do this but the parents think it is good for them. When the boys go into the Service she wants them to join a branch that will teach them a trade. Both boys like to read and both want to learn typing. The father tells them that they must learn to use their heads, because soon machinery will do all the work. The mother wants them to learn music when they go to boarding school. Both parents spoke of how much they feel the school means and how glad they are to get to know the teacher.

They felt that "when the kids talk about you it helps to know how you look." The teacher said that he thought it nice for parents to know something about the kind of person their child's teacher is, so he told about his own schooling; how he was raised on a farm and went to a rural school, then moved to town and so on. He spoke of some of the things he liked to do, of interest in sports, and of some amateur photography. That brought up things in both the father's and mother's earlier years that they had not mentioned, and by the time the teacher left they had all begun to feel acquainted.

Parents usually enjoy knowing the teacher as a person. Often the getting acquainted is one-sided, with the teacher finding out about the parents but with them knowing little more about the teacher when he leaves than when he came. It is nice to make the getting acquainted a two-way matter.

19. Herschel (12), Seventh Grade, Private School.

The teacher had asked the parents for an appointment. If possible, he wanted to find out what lay back of Herschel's apparent lack of interest in anything at school and his general inactivity. The talk at first was on general school matters, with the teacher asking how the parents felt the boy was getting on. The father said he had no special concern whether the child did much academically or not, since he would never have to work for a living anyway. As conversation went on the following picture unfolded. The mother had had to stay in bed six months before each of the two children was born, so "each is more than just another child, but something very special." As a baby, the boy was kept on a rigid schedule, everything he handled was boiled, and no one but the parents were allowed to hold or handle him. Herschel had asthma at nine months, so they moved to the dry climate where they have continued to live. The asthma disappeared when he was seven. Then he had ulcers, which he still has on occasion. Both Herschel and his brother are always with the parents, are at ease with any adult, very polite, and can

converse fluently on many subjects. Herschel's friends are always welcome because he only chooses those whom the family approves. He has an allowance and does many foolish things with it, but his father says, "That is part of learning, and he will be as practical as he needs to be." The teacher asked if he enjoys school and the father said, "No, not especially, but it isn't necessary that he should; he will make out well enough." The mother said that they would be glad if he did well enough to go to college because it gives one good contacts, but that they plan to travel as soon as the children can be taken out of school. Travel, she added, can be more broadening than school and much more enjoyable.

By the time the interview was over, the teacher felt he had a fair picture of some of the reasons back of Herschel's school behavior. As the parents were leaving they said that they would like to have the teacher and his wife to come for dinner some evening, and the invitation was accepted.

As the teacher thought over the interview later, he said that he wondered if the parents were really as indifferent to the child's school achievement as they appeared, and if not, why they put up this front. He wondered whether it was better to try to rouse the child to some interest or just leave him to go on his lackadaisical indifferent way. The thought of the asthma and the ulcers suggested a strain and tension, and, altogether, he decided to talk it over with the guidance counsellor. As interviews go on, a teacher soon becomes sensitive to the situations where much more lies beneath the surface than at first appears. Often just enough shows, as was the case here, to suggest that the matter lies beyond the teacher's province. Often, too, as may be the case here, there is little that teacher or counsellor can do about it.

20. Floyd (11), Fourth Grade, Public School.

Several notes had been sent home asking the parents to come for an interview, but no attention had been paid to them. Floyd

said that his father was too busy and his mother was sick. The principal said neither parent had ever come, so the teacher went to the home. The mother was there, but the father was away. The home was a two-room shack in which the parents lived with six children. Two other children were living away from home. Later the teacher learned that the father drinks heavily, though the mother only said that he was not able to work much. The paternal grandparents live near and evidently give some help. The mother spoke of being very interested in the school and of hoping that all the children would go through high school. An older brother is doing well in high school, living with an uncle in a city some distance away. She wants Floyd to go there, too. She asked if Floyd behaves at school and on the school bus, and said that she thinks of school as the most important thing in the children's lives. She spoke of having him read to her and of helping him and the others with their homework. She listened with great interest to all the teacher had to tell about the work at school and asked many questions about the way things were done. The teacher told of Floyd's helpfulness, of how carefully his work is done, and of how the children like him. And the mother said, "This is good to hear." She appreciated the teacher's coming to talk with her. She said she had always meant to get to the school but had never quite been able to make it, with so many little ones to look after. No word was said about not having the clothes to wear for coming to school. And no word of apology was spoken for the poverty of the home. The teacher said that she came away with a feeling of deep respect for that mother's quiet dignity and a feeling of admiration for one who, with so little to go on, could send a child to school always looking fresh and clean.

Many times a teacher who pursues the matter to find out why a parent does not come to school will find, as did this teacher, that there are reasons she could not have guessed. Sometimes there are those who do not care, but more often it is something else, and a teacher does need to know what it is.

21. Barbara (11), Sixth Grade, Public School.

The mother came to the school for the interview at her own request. Barbara is in a school where crowded conditions make half-day sessions necessary, and she comes to the afternoon session. The mother came to ask if she could be changed to the morning session. Two reasons were given: One was that, since she does not have to go to school until noon, Barbara sees no use of getting up in the morning and the mother feels that she is getting into a bad habit of lolling around in bed and wasting time. The other is that she takes piano, clarinet, and baton-twirling lessons, all of which come after school, and it rushes her every day of the week, since she also has Scouts and Junior Choir.

The teacher asked if Barbara knew that the request was being made, and the mother said no, that she wanted to find out first whether it could be done. The teacher asked if the mother thought that Barbara would mind leaving her friends in the afternoon group, and the mother said that there are as many of her friends in one session as in the other. The teacher told the mother that, since moving a child from one session to the other is an administrative matter, it would have to be discussed with the principal and that he would be glad to do this and call the mother to let her know the decision.

Then he asked how she felt Barbara was enjoying school, and she said, "Oh, fine. Barbara enjoys everything." And then, as a sort of afterthought, she asked how the teacher thought Barbara was getting on, and when he said that her work is excellent and that she is a general favorite, the mother said, "Goodness me! I thought for a minute maybe you were leading up to something."

It does seem that there is often a hangover of fear that the teacher may have something adverse to say. When parents come with a request such as this, they usually do feel very appreciative if the teacher is willing to consider the matter instead of being irritated, as does sometimes happen, at being asked to make a change.

22. Patricia (10), Fifth Grade, Private School.

The interview was held with the mother in the office where she works, since her hours make it hard for her to get to the school and the home is so far out that it is difficult for the teacher to go there. The reason for the interview was the difficulty that Patricia had been having with her schoolwork. Previously her grades had been good, but recently there has been a slump. The teacher wondered if the mother would have any explanation for it and if there were anything that she, the teacher, could do to help about it. At first, the mother said that she knew of no reason; that Patricia was helped with her work at home as usual. The teacher asked if she spoke happily of school at home, saying that there seemed to be enjoyment of the other children. They all come together on the school bus and Patricia is very much one of the group.

They talked about her schoolwork for a while, then the mother finally said she guessed she might as well tell the difficulty. She said that she had not wanted to speak of it and would appreciate the teacher's holding it as confidential until it became generally known. She said the father and she had decided to separate, though no one knew it yet, that it was a case of another woman, and that he planned to resign his teaching position and go away. She said that they hoped that he would be gone before it became known and that she would not have spoken of it except that she knew this was what was bothering Patricia and she thought that, since the teacher cared enough to ask, she should know. She said that Patricia only knew that her father was going away and that she knew nothing about the separation. The mother did not know how to tell her, but said she knew the child sensed that something very disturbing was going on. The mother was so upset that the teacher asked if she had talked to anyone about it. She said that she had no one to go to, that she did not want her family to know it, and that she would not speak of it to friends. The teacher suggested that maybe the minister could help, but the mother said no, emphatically, but

with no explanations. Then the teacher suggested that when the mother felt she would like to talk with someone, perhaps the school guidance counsellor would be a good one to go to, since she, too, was interested in Patricia. The mother said she had thought of that, but she did not feel ready to do it. The teacher did not press it, but said that she would now know better how to help Patricia at school. She suggested that it would be best not to say anything to the child about the poor grades, since she already had enough to worry her. She said that of course the mother could depend on her to hold all that had been told in confidence, and that if she wanted at any time to see the counsellor, the teacher would be glad to do anything she could to help. The mother thanked her for coming and said it had been a great relief to talk to someone. (Later she phoned and asked the teacher to make an appointment with the counsellor, saying that she thought she needed some advice on what to tell Patricia. The teacher asked if she would like to have her explain any of the situation to the counsellor, and she said to please do so; then she would not have to go over it again.)

This teacher may have wished that she could tell the guidance counsellor the situation as soon as she found out about it, especially if the poor grades had come to the counsellor's attention. As a matter of fact they had, and the teacher told the counsellor that she knew the reasons but that she had been asked to hold it in confidence. The counsellor understood and did not press the matter. It is fortunate when teacher and counsellor can have a working relationship such as this.

C. With Parents of the Teen-Ager

23. Christina (18), High School Senior.

Christina had infantile paralysis when she was about two and walks with crutches. She gets around well and goes to the school dances, where she dances the slow ones and sits the others out. She is president of the class and takes part in all of the activities. She loves the piano and has learned to play, even though her

hands have been somewhat affected by the paralysis. She loves baseball and basketball and goes to all the games. She wants to go to college and prepare for teaching. The mother asked for an interview with the teacher, who has been very close to Christina during all of the four years of high school, to talk over the advisability of the girl's preparing for teaching. The parents have felt that her handicap may make it hard to get a position, yet they have not wanted to discourage her, and, having taught her all her life to pay no attention to the handicap, they do not like to mention it now as deterring her from her wish to teach. The teacher spoke of the course in teacher education preparing for teaching exceptional children and suggested that perhaps this would be a special field which would appeal to Christina. The teacher said that recently, in discussing various vocational openings with the seniors, this had come up. The mother asked if the teacher would talk to Christina about it and the teacher suggested that the three of them, and the father, too, talk it over together. The mother asked if the teacher would come to dinner so that they could do it informally at home. It was suggested that it be mentioned to Christina first, and, if agreeable to her, the teacher would come.

A teacher who is at all interested in the boys and girls and in knowing the parents finds himself touching the youngster's life at many points other than the actual schoolwork, as was the case here. It takes time but it is one of the great rewards of teaching.

24. Miguel (18), High School Senior.

This boy is one of eleven children in a Mexican family. The interview was with the mother, who spoke no English, and the conversation was carried on through an older sister. The mother had sent word to school that she wanted to talk with the teacher and asked if he would come, which he did. She explained that they wanted Miguel to go away to school and that they had been saving so that he could, but now he wants to marry and go to work instead. The father works in the mines and the family has always had a hard time to get along. Four older children are

married and away. The girl Miguel wants to marry is one who lived with the family for a time when her own people died. She is very ambitious and had a great deal to do with Miguel going on and finishing high school. He had wanted to stop and work before to make things easier for his mother and sisters (he is the only boy), but the girl urged him to listen to his mother and finish. Now the girl says that when commencement is over she is ready to marry, that he can go on with school as he works and they will study together. The amount they have been able to save is so small (though it looks large to them) that the boy would have to work his way through school almost entirely, which he had planned to do until he decided that he wanted to marry. The boy had already talked to the teacher about it some weeks before, but the mother did not know this and the teacher could not tell her, because he respected Miguel's confidence. The teacher talked with the mother as best he could through the sister, saying that perhaps Miguel would be happier to be married and working, that he knew Miguel had given it a great deal of thought, and that he would talk with him. He said that he could not advise the boy what to do, because that would be for Miguel to decide. When the teacher talked with Miguel, as he told the mother he would, the boy said that he knew it would be better for them all if he worked. He thought he could go on to college later, maybe after his stint in the service, but now he could not be happy unless he married. He said that his mother would have to get used to the idea, because he had made up his mind and had found a job.

When the teacher went back a week or so later to talk with the mother, she told him she had finally become reconciled to the marriage, since the priest had also told her that Miguel was the one to decide.

This teacher said that it was a hard thing for him to do to keep from advising either the mother or Miguel. He could see so well how the mother felt; he knew how she had counted on that boy going to college and he thought Miguel had the ability to do well at college. But he could see the boy's side of it, too. Miguel saw

the Service close at hand and felt if he did not marry the girl now she would probably marry another, and the Service and college looked like a long stretch without her. Often a teacher finds it difficult to stay away from giving advice, but it is best to stay away from it in such a matter as this.

25. Arlene (16), Junior in High School.

The mother asked for the interview. She wanted the teacher's advice on whether she should go on working or whether it was bad for Arlene to have her at work. There is one younger child but she is not concerned about her, since she is cared for at the grandmother's while the mother is at work. It is Arlene that she wonders about. If she works Arlene can have the things she wants and that she could not otherwise have because the father's income is limited. Recently he had a heat stroke and then a car accident, and finances are in a bad condition. The mother's earnings are needed if there is to be anything beyond the bare necessities. On the other hand, when she is away all day she cannot have things as nice as she would like to have them for Arlene's friends when they come in. She is not at home when Arlene gets there and when she does come she is tired and doesn't feel up to doing the things she would like to do with and for the girl. Arlene works on weekends, and the mother says that, what with having some money of her own and having the mother away so much, "she has got a little cocky and has to be simmered down about once a week."

The teacher asked how the family feels about the mother's working, and the mother said that she talked it all over with them before taking the job and they agreed that she should take it and that they would do their share at home. The teacher asked how Arlene feels about it now. The mother said that Arlene wants her to go on working because it gives her more things and more freedom, and that is one thing that makes the mother wonder whether she should.

The teacher asked how the agreement that Arlene and her

sister would do their share had worked out. The mother said that it has not worked very well, that the sister does pretty well but Arlene takes the responsibility very lightly. When the teacher asked whether she would take more responsibility if the mother were home, she said, "Oh, no. Then she wouldn't take any." The teacher asked what would happen if the house were left for Arlene to get in order for her friends, and the mother replied that she "probably would lick in at the last minute and do it but she would be mad about it."

It may sound like a question-answer interview, but the questions were dropped in here and there and the mother did most of the talking. Once the teacher asked if the mother wanted to work. She said that in some ways she did and in others she did not, that it seemed to her she was making Arlene selfish whichever way it was, but that the money she earns is really needed.

Whenever things go wrong the father calls a family meeting and they talk it over. After this, things go better for a while, but always it is only herself that Arlene considers and what she wants is all that matters to her. The teacher gave no advice but let the mother pretty much think aloud, which seemed to be what she needed. It was a matter on which no one could advise. The teacher did say that in school Arlene was doing good work and that in her relationships with the others in class everything seemed to be going well. The mother left, saying that she had some ideas she had not thought about before and that she believed that, in their family council, maybe they had better think over what it meant to each of them and not just to Arlene. She said maybe she would let Arlene get up and get breakfast some mornings while she slept later. The more she thought of it she said the more they all just considered Arlene and maybe they had always spoiled her.

Here again is an example of a situation in which only the people concerned can decide what to do. Certainly the teacher cannot advise. This situation is one of those where one may be tempted to jump to the conclusion that if the mother were not working all would be well. It is not always so simple, and often

a teacher sees plainly enough that all is not solved by Mother quitting her job or by not going to work in the first place. Sometimes it is the solution, but a teacher needs always to beware of setting up a rule of thumb.

26. *Juanita (13), Sixth Grade.*

Juanita brought word from home that the parents would like the teacher to come there, because they wanted to talk to her but, since there was a small baby, the mother could not come to school. When she got to the home the parents wanted to know why Juanita did not have better grades. They said that they wanted her to do good schoolwork, and here she brought home a report card for the first quarter with poor grades. The teacher said that Juanita pays attention and works hard at her work and that she has been making progress. The father said, "Then if she works hard and pays attention is it that she is dumb?" The teacher spoke about some people working well with books and others with making things, and told of the very nice work Juanita had done with some of the handicrafts. The father stuck to his point: "Then she is dumb with books?" The teacher said that Juanita did find some of the work hard, but that she was doing the best she could. She said that Juanita got along well with the other children, always tended to her own business, and was always ready to be helpful. She pointed out that these are important things, too.

The father asked, "Wouldn't it be better if things were taught the old way, when children really learned something, instead of these ways when they do everything but work problems and read." The teacher spoke of the things that the children learn from doing things in groups, of their discussions of affairs that go on around them, and of their reading of the newspapers, and the parents agreed that there is probably something to those things. They showed the corner of the living room, which had a table and chair for Juanita to do her homework, and the mother spoke of being pleased with the sewing that the girl was learning

at school. But the father said, "School is not for sewing, it is for learning from books; and I want to know is she not going to learn from books?"

Before going to the home the teacher had talked with the principal and they had agreed that the time may have come for the parents to be told that Juanita had gone about as far in school as she would be able to go. They decided that, if possible, it would be better to have the parents come to school so the principal could be in on the interview, but he said for the teacher to use her judgment when she was at the home. When the father pressed her, she said that this was a matter she and the principal would like to talk with him about, and that the principal would tell him of the results of tests that were given to all the children. The father said that he would come and that when he did he wanted to know what was what.

Situations such as this often come up when the things to be told are not pleasant to hear but when it is the parents' right to know. In doing it one can always go about it as this teacher and principal probably did, in terms of what is the best next step for the child.

27. Sylvia (15), Freshman in High School.

Sylvia invited the teacher home for dinner particularly to see the new dress that she and her mother were finishing for the school dance. It seems that Sylvia is perfectly willing to wear daytime dresses indefinitely, but she insists she cannot possibly wear an evening dress the second time. So her mother has agreed to make them if Sylvia does the housework while Mother sews. The current one was particularly attractive and the mother was pleased when Sylvia wished the teacher could see it, so she told her to ask her for dinner. During dinner the mother brought up the matter of Sylvia's taking sewing in school and asked if cooking were offered too, and asked who was eligible to take those courses. The teacher explained about the course set-up and which ones were electives. She said that the homemaking courses were very practical but that they required just as much study and

hard work as any others. She said she mentioned that because so often these courses were looked upon as requiring less work than others. Sylvia began to laugh and said to her mother, "You gave her a tip." The mother said she had not even talked to the teacher before she came to dinner. It came out then that the mother had wanted Sylvia to take some of the homemaking courses but she had said that those things were just for the ones who could not do well with books, and she could do all right with books. The mother said that she thought it was good for a girl to know how to do those things, but she had never made Sylvia do much of that sort of thing at home. The family spends a great deal of time with music and reading and other things and housework is sort of secondary, so Sylvia does not know much about it. She is in the school band and the marching band, is an active member of school clubs, and is active in church work, and the parents spoke of being pleased to have her active in many things. They said that their frequent moving had put her back in school but that it does not matter. They feel that she gets more out of it by not being hurried through and there is time enough, even if she decides to go to college. They asked about her schoolwork and were pleased with all the teacher told of her interest and good work.

The father said that he was interested principally in Sylvia's being what he called an all-around person, and that he was all for whatever in school helped with that. He spoke especially about the High School Forum and asked for details about it and about the Student Government Plan.

When a teacher finds an interest such as this, it is a real opportunity to hear how different school activities look to parents who are giving thought to the matter. It is another example of how an interview can benefit both teacher and parents.

28. Kenneth (14), High School Freshman.

Kenneth's father dropped in at school late one afternoon on his way home from the office. He had been in to see the principal but had not found him, so he came in to the shop to see if the

shop teacher were there. He said he had something on his mind and wanted to get it talked about. In his opinion there is too much book work in this high school and not enough of the extra things that let the boys and girls learn how to run things and get along with each other. In the schools where he has had children before (they had just moved to town), there had been too many of those extra things and now here there are not enough. The teacher asked what kind of things he meant and he said Glee Club, Orchestra, Dramatic Clubs, Nature Hike Clubs, Science Clubs, anything to get the youngsters on their own and thinking up things to do. He said that he thought book work was all right but that it could go too far and that he wanted his boy to have a chance at these other things. The teacher talked with him for a while and then said that this was something to talk over with the principal. The father also complained that there was no PTA for the high school, and that parents ought to pay attention to what goes on there, too. The teacher said that, too, would be something to talk over with the principal, and suggested that the father come back soon and do it. He said he would, and he did.

As a start the principal brought in the music teacher, who was delighted to have some backing, and plans began for doing something about an orchestra, since this was the father's greatest interest. He offered to put up some money for instruments and said that he would talk with some of the other dads to see what they would do. This was the music teacher's first year (in fact, the first year for a music teacher in this small-town school) and shortly they did get an orchestra under way, with several mothers and dads helping out by playing instruments, as well as putting up money for them. Eventually a high school PTA was organized and other things got under way, partly because a teacher was ready to listen to a father with ideas instead of brushing him off with, "It can't be done because it never has been."

29. John (14), Sophomore in High School.

The father phoned for an appointment with the English instructor, and when he came said he wanted to give the teacher a

tip, but that John not be told that he had come. John writes for the school paper and for the church paper. If he gets stuck for an idea he talks it over with his parents. The greatest trouble, according to his father, is that he thinks his first draft of an article should be the final one and is unwilling to work at sentence structure and change of thought here and there to improve it. He comes home and storms whenever the teacher has made even the smallest adverse comment. The father said that he wanted the teacher to know that he would stand back of him, that he thought John should be held to stricter regulations on his work, and that he wished the teacher would do it. They talked it over and agreed that John has talent but that he does need to learn better work habits if he is to make anything of it. The father is a U. S. Park Superintendent and John and his brother have had opportunity to roam the hills since they were little. Now they help in the park and John has a wealth of nature material which he uses to write about. The family has lived in a trailer until recently, but now they are in a new home and John has his own room with a new desk and all that he needs to encourage his writing, which he loves.

Often one thinks of an interview as being some thought-out, planned-for event in which many different things are discussed in detail. Instead, many are like this one—one parent or the other runs in with an idea and it is talked about and he is off, but because parent and teacher got together the youngster benefits.

30. Viola (13), Seventh Grade.

The interview was with Viola's uncle, who had phoned for an appointment. Viola and her younger sister have been living with the grandparents and this uncle. The grandmother had died a couple of weeks before, leaving the grandfather and uncle to look after the two girls. Their mother had died when they were little and the whereabouts of the father are unknown, he and the mother having been divorced shortly before the birth of the youngest girl. The uncle came in to talk with the teacher about what to do now. He said that he and the grandfather could go

along for a while, but that they thought the girls needed a woman in the house and he thought that they would try to get a housekeeper soon. Meanwhile, he wanted to know if there were anything he should be doing about Viola's schoolwork. He wanted her good grades to keep up, and whatever needed doing at home he wanted to do. The teacher talked her work over with him, told him about the type of work she did, suggested that he might keep an eye on homework, though it was always well done, and said that she would be glad to be of any help she could in talking over the schoolwork. He asked her to let him know if she heard of a housekeeper. She did know of a woman who had a small child and wanted to work where she could have the child with her. She did not recommend the woman; just gave the name for him to look into the matter himself.

One could go on indefinitely telling of what teachers and parents have found it useful to talk about without ever once finding the same combination of things discussed in any two interviews. Of course this would be so, because the thought and experiences and needs of the people doing the discussing are different each time. Probably one would often be astonished to know of some of the things that are mentioned as teacher and parents talk together. Some of them may be things that one would never have thought important enough to take up in an interview, but anything that touches upon the child's living may very well be important. One of the reasons for having interviews is to get acquainted, and one of the reasons for getting acquainted is to be able to think together about the things that concern the child's well-being at school, which, of course, is closely akin to his well-being at home. So, when the question of what to talk about in an interview comes up, the answer naturally will be to talk about the things that teacher and parents have on their minds that have to do with that child's well-being. They may be little things or they may be big things. There may be only one or two things that will come up in any one interview, or there may be many. They may be the things that the teacher has thought about ahead of time, or they may not. They may be things that one

SOME INTERVIEWS—WHAT WAS DISCUSSED 253

can do something about, or they may not. Many of the things that come up may not be problems at all, but all of them may be useful for better understanding. The more a teacher can think of an interview with parents as a friendly talking together about the youngster's living, the easier it will be to know what to talk about. With that feeling of friendliness and ease, it will be natural to speak of whatever it is that comes to mind as useful in the daily schoolroom living with the youngster. It will be just as natural for the parents to speak of what is in their thoughts as it touches the child's school life. These are the things to talk about, and there will be plenty of them.

PART FOUR

Planning and doing

Even though it is about as natural a thing as one can think of for teachers and parents to talk together, it does take quite a bit of thinking and planning if an interview is to be of real usefulness and not just idle conversation.

First of all it is necessary to plan far-ahead, to think over the ways that one might carry on interviews, and to come to some basic conclusion about what seems to one to be, in general, a good way of going about it all. This would include thinking about the kind of interviews one believes are a good idea, thinking about the details of arrangements that help things to go smoothly, thinking about the types of things that might be talked about, and thinking about the ways of doing that are thoughtful and considerate. This is background planning. It is the planning that a teacher can do without ever knowing where she will be teaching.

When the place of teaching is known the time has come for more specific planning. The teacher will then need to think about what she would like to do in the particular school, to think about where she might begin, to find out, perhaps, what has been done before. She may be waiting to hear what the administrator will suggest about interviews, or he may have said at once that it is an established policy for teachers to have interviews with the parents. Each different place, of course, must have its own plan, the plan that fits that group of children, those parents, and that administrator. It will probably vary greatly from the background planning the teacher did before

12. What? How? When? Where?

THE WHAT, WHY, HOW, WHAT KIND, WHO, when, and where of teacher-parent interviews are practical details about which teachers often ask. They are details that have a great deal to do with the success of one's interviews. Although no final answer can be given on any one of them, there are a good many pointers that one can offer to help in deciding what is best to do in a given situation. It is these that are gathered together here.

A. Some Different Kinds of Interviews

No one can say what kinds of interviews any one teacher should have. It usually works out in a natural sort of way. Even so, it seems a good idea to think over the possibilities of different types. They seem to fall into two general groupings: those that are more or less planned for or expected or scheduled, and those that are incidental. Then there is a third group which may be somewhat planned and somewhat incidental. This is the interview by telephone. These are very rough groupings and they do

overlap, but any grouping would be overlapping, and this will serve for discussion.

1. Those that are planned.

This refers to the interviews that happen because of the conscious intent that teacher and parents shall talk together, the ones that come about because the administrator or teacher or both think that talking together should not be left to chance. There may be a plan that there shall be a given number a year, for specific purposes, with the approximate times specified. The registration and reporting interviews are examples of the ones that would fall into this group. They might be thought of as administrative in nature. Chances are, with these, the administrator will have set up certain guides and the teacher will be instructed accordingly. In the registration interview, there are likely to be certain bits of information to be obtained from the parents and others to be given by the teacher. Perhaps there will be forms for recording this information. This registration interview is often the first step toward other interviews.

The reporting interview is, in many schools, coming to take the place of the formal report card. Or it may be used as a means of presenting and amplifying the evaluation of the child's school progress as shown on the card. The reporting interview offers a wonderful opportunity for teacher and parents to look together into all of a child's school living, since progress in school subjects, group activity, and individual relationships are all very closely interrelated. Whether the reporting interview is officially set up by the administration or not, teacher and parents could hardly talk together without some reporting of progress, so there is likely to be a reporting aspect to almost any interview.

Interviews may be planned for in the sense that it is a part of the school policy that teachers shall make it a point to talk with the parents of all of the children. Perhaps it is specified that this

shall be as early in the year as possible, or that it shall be once each semester, or it may be left to the teacher to work out. It may be that the plan calls for interviews whenever the teacher feels it is necessary, without specifying that effort be made to see all of the parents at some time during the year. In this case the interviews often are largely with parents of children who have a "problem." The parents of the youngsters who have no special problem may have little opportunity to talk with the teacher, yet in the good adjustment of these children lie potentialities that could profitably be nourished and brought to rich fruition. That is why some schools plan for the teacher to talk with the parents of all of the children.

One would ordinarily think of the planned-for interview as any specific interview which the teacher thinks about and arranges for ahead of time, giving consideration to the time and place for it and to what to talk about, and having in mind something of what it is hoped will be accomplished. It may serve getting-acquainted purposes. It may be used to report progress. Problems may come up or they may not. The things that the teacher planned to discuss may or may not get talked about. These things do not matter especially. The significant thing is that the talking together seems so important that it is thoughtfully planned for.

2. Those that are incidental.

These are the interviews for which no time has been set, the ones that come about casually, the ones where teacher and parent probably are bent on some other mission than talking together. One may see the parent at the super-market, on the street, at some social affair, or at the PTA meeting; or, if the child is a little one, it may be when the youngster is left or called for.

These incidental contacts often serve a good purpose in being informal and pretty spontaneous. Many times both teacher and

parents talk more freely when they feel under no necessity to talk at all. The fact that the chatting is casual and incidental to something else does not mean that it need be any less purposeful. There is always plenty that a teacher can have in mind to bring up when there is an opportune moment to do it. It may be something that the youngster did unusually well, or something he said that the teacher knew the parent would like to hear, or some bit of information that the teacher wants to ask for, or perhaps some difficulty that the teacher would like to get the parent's idea about without making any great point of mentioning it. Chances are the parent, too, has things tucked away in his mind to speak to the teacher about, though he may not feel that they are of enough importance to ask for an appointment. Using the moments when teacher and parents happen onto each other to good advantage is one way of getting in more interviewing than might otherwise be possible.

Incidental interviewing has other points in its favor, too. Sometimes a parent who is too shy and ill at ease to feel comfortable about coming to school at a given time will willingly stop to talk a few minutes when no point is made of it. Often a mother who is working and is pressed for time prizes these informal chats more than the teacher may ever know. Often it is the only way to get in any conversation with a parent who has not yet thought that it would be of any special help to talk with the teacher, or one who is pretty indifferent to what the child is doing at school, or one who is always dashing to the office and never can stop, or one whose calendar is so full of engagements that time never can be found for an appointment with the teacher.

Often the casual incidental talking together leads to the planned-for interview, when things can be talked over in more leisurely fashion. A teacher soon becomes sensitive to when it is best to have the one kind and when the other. It is no case of either/or, but rather a matter of doing whatever best serves the purpose; doing it one way one time, the other way another time.

3. The telephone interview.

As one thinks of teacher and parents talking together, it seems natural to assume that they will be looking at each other as they do it, whether the meeting be planned-for or incidental. It would probably be agreed that usually there is a better chance for give and take that way than any other. Yet there have been many useful interviews over the telephone.

Some are interviews that might have been long delayed or might never have taken place had teacher and parents waited to get together. Maybe the homes are far from school, with the children coming by bus; or the time the parent could come might not be convenient for the teacher, or vice-versa; or the matter to be discussed perhaps could not wait even to the next day. Furthermore, a shy parent (or a shy teacher, for that matter) often can make the start of acquaintance over the telephone when one excuse or another would have put off the face-to-face meeting. Often the pleasantness and warm cordiality of a voice and the obvious interest that prompted the call makes the face-to-face meeting a more welcome prospect than first was thought. For the working mother who must get home to her youngsters as fast as possible and who would find it almost impossible to delay that arrival or to get away in the evening for more than an occasional interview, the telephone offers the opportunity for the interviews she probably is very glad to have. Often, too, one will get complaints over the telephone that never would be spoken face-to-face, and when there are complaints in thought it is well for them to come out, whether by telephone or otherwise.

The telephone interview may be as incidental and casual as the meeting on the street. The teacher calls to inquire for the youngster who has been ill, little thinking that the parent will welcome the chance to ask what could be done at home to help keep up his schoolwork, to tell how he misses the children, to say how much he has been enjoying school, and to mention

the child's fear that he will not pass. The relief in the parents' voice when the teacher says there is no cause to worry about not passing may tell plainly enough that the child was not the only one harboring that fear, and the appreciation of the teacher's calling may so speak of the parents' own need for encouragement that the teacher will be glad that the call was made.

Perhaps the telephone serves its most useful purpose when acquaintance between teacher and parent has begun with face-to-face meeting, when each knows what the other looks like, when the voice one hears is attached in thought to a person whom one has seen. It is in the face-to-face interview only, of course, that teacher and parents can see the expressions and gestures which often tell more than the words that are spoken, where there can be pauses for considering what has been said or to think about what to say, where there is no need for hurry in speaking, where there can be the interplay of feeling which is so basic a part of understanding.

B. Persons to Participate

The people to participate in an interview will depend to a great extent on what is going to be talked about. Probably most times it will be just the teacher and one or both of the parents, but sometimes it may be helpful to include some other person. This is a matter to which a teacher does well to give quite a bit of thought.

1. The parents.

Certainly a teacher who really wants to know a child will need, sooner or later, to plan to talk with both the father and mother; perhaps together, perhaps separately, depending on circumstances. Sometimes the idea of interviews with fathers is a new one; new to the teacher, new to the father and mother, and perhaps new to the administrator. If teacher-mother rather than teacher-parent interviews have been the custom in a particular

school it may seem wise to begin that way; if not, one may want to start off with the two together.

Often a teacher feels uneasy at the idea of interviewing fathers and is at a loss to know how to go about it. They, too, like to talk about their children, are interested in what they do in school, and have definite ideas about their bringing up. Sometimes everyone takes it for granted that the fathers are too occupied with business to take time for interviews and is surprised when, once given the chance, they very willingly arrange so that they can. Sometimes, too, it is assumed that bringing up children, at least attending to school contacts, is more or less the mother's job unless something comes up that calls for father's hand to settle. The growing understanding these days of the vital importance to a youngster of having his father take an active part in his life from babyhood on through all the years is changing the father's role considerably in the thinking of people in general and fathers themselves. They are in on many more things than they used to be, and interviews with the teachers may very well be included.

2. The child himself.

There comes up the question, too, of when, if at all, the child himself should be included. When the interview has to do with the report of school progress, it is enlightening to have the youngster concerned present to give his own comments about his progress. When the subject under discussion is the working out of some detail of behavior, no one can speak as can the youngster about how he feels about it. Often both teacher and parents find feelings set forth that are quite different from what either had thought were there. Some interviews may be for planning the part the child will take in a program, or for arranging about bringing a collection that perhaps he is going to exhibit at school, or for planning an excursion to his home to see some pets, to have a picnic there, to look at slides of the latest vacation trip, or to see a collection that cannot well be

moved to school. Certainly, in interviews such as these, the child could well be a participant.

There are, of course, many instances when teacher and parents do better to talk alone, when the parents' feelings can be more freely expressed than if the child were present and when possible courses of action may be more freely discussed. This is only to suggest that there are times when it would add greatly to the value of the interview to have the youngster in on it.

3. Others in the family.

When the interview is at home, it seems natural for the members of the family to have some part in it, though perhaps not in all of it, depending upon who they are and what they would have to offer. There may be a grandparent who lives in the home and touches the child's life closely. Or the grandparents may live nearby and may have a lot to do with the child. Often grandparents or some other relative can see the child in a different light than that in which the parents see him and can help greatly in adding to a teacher's understanding of the youngster. Or there may be an older brother or sister to speak from that relationship. If it is a young child and there is a nurse or a maid who has much of his care she, too, may have something to add. All of a child's relationships play their part in his being what he is and it is part of understanding him to know the people who know him. Therein lies one of the advantages of a home interview. Of course it would lie with the parents whether or not these others would be included, though a teacher may often have the opportunity to speak of its being helpful to meet any who have much of a part in the child's life.

4. The administrator.

Often there will be an occasion for the administrator to participate in all or part of the interview. Maybe the point in question is something that came to his attention and, although

he has asked the teacher to have the interview, he may want to sit in, both for the sake of the information it will give him and for the help he can give in the discussion. Or it may be that the matter involves school policy and it is understood that in any such instance he is to be notified and will come in, because his word of authority is needed in deciding what is both possible and advisable. Maybe the parents are considering what will come next for the youngster who is finishing school or perhaps leaving before finishing, or it may be a question of the boy or girl going into some area of work in which the teacher knows the administrator has special knowledge and interest, and it is natural to ask if he will join in the interview. Or the teacher may feel none too sure about some interview coming up and may need his moral support or help in carrying it on. Or he may just want to drop in for a few minutes as a means of getting to know the parents of all the children as soon as possible.

5. The specialist.

Sometimes things will come up that suggest asking some special teacher to come in for part of the interview; maybe the art or music teacher, the gym instructor, the athletic coach, the homemaking teacher, or whoever it is that could add to the particular discussion. Often the parents are glad to meet the special teachers, whom they may have little opportunity to know, and to hear first hand from them about the youngster's interest, or about some of the things being done, or of any special talent the child is showing, or of his accomplishments, or difficulties if there are such, or perhaps about things that could be done at home that would be helpful. And the special teacher may be glad, too, for the opportunity to meet the parents.

There are likely to be occasions that will suggest calling in the guidance specialist, or the clinical psychologist, or the social worker, or the visiting teacher. The nurse, of course, should always be called in whenever things touch on the health field.

There will be some matters which will be turned over to the specialist entirely; matters which lie outside the teacher's province to handle or matters that have to do with deep-seated difficulties of one sort or another.

No one can say who should participate in the teacher-parent interview, or how often others should be asked in. It is a matter of what seems best at the time. Sometimes a teacher hesitates because she does not want to impose on another's time, but it can be of value to the other, too; of enough value to justify the time spent. Usually one can safely assume that they too, are ready and willing enough to help. A teacher sometimes, without even realizing it, has a lurking fear that bringing in another may undermine her own prestige with the parents. Usually they will have great respect for a teacher whose first concern is their youngster and who is ready to do anything that will help in making his school experience the best it can possibly be. They are reasonable enough that they are not going to expect a teacher to have all the answers. In fact, it may add greatly to their confidence to find that the teacher makes no pretense of knowing them all and is ready to turn to others for what they can offer.

Often a teacher feels comfortable when talking with the parents alone but is timid about going ahead with the interview when some other person is present. One can begin with the person with whom one can feel most at ease and then branch out from there. Perhaps there will be no need to have whoever is coming stay for the whole interview. A few minutes may be enough. One is likely to find that, when thought is centered on the youngster and the help this may be to him, fears will be forgotten. It may be that the teacher realizes that, although it would be a good idea to get some light from this angle or that, the person who would be the one to come in has no special liking for parents and little interest in talking with them. One always has to consider what is best under the circumstances. If neither the person coming in nor the parents would be happy about it, little would be gained.

This all may sound as if it is being suggested that more often

than not someone besides teacher and parents might profitably be participating in the teacher-parent interview. Not at all. Many, many times a teacher will probably feel that it would be better if just the teacher and one or both parents were present. Indeed, that is the kind of interview this whole book is about. What has been said here about others participating is only to suggest that a teacher does well to keep her thought open to the possibility that this one or that one might add to the usefulness of the interview and to include them when that is the case.

C. The Place for the Interview

The actual place is of less moment than that it be convenient for those concerned and that all should be comfortable and at ease. Wherever this is best accomplished is the place to be chosen. Both school and home have advantages and disadvantages. After one considers the pros and cons, it boils down to doing what seems best in the school where one is teaching and for the particular interview one is going to have.

1. About having it at school.

Having the parents come to school is a time-saver for the teacher, and time must be considered when there are many interviews to be held. There is the advantage, too, of having parents become familiar with the school in general and the child's room in particular. For parents who have just moved into the community or for those whose child is just starting to school, it offers the opportunity to see the school layout. Often a brief tour, with special attention to the parts of the building that their child uses, is an easy way to begin to get acquainted and to give a little idea of the services the school offers. Even if the child has been in school, the moving on to a different grade, maybe into junior high or senior high, may mean using school facilities that the parents have known about in general but to which they have paid no special attention and which

now take on new interest. Maybe there are improvements to the building that are of interest. Anyway, coming to the school serves to give a mental picture of the school set-up, where their child spends so many of his waking hours. Even more important than the physical set-up is the whole emotional tone of the building, which one can catch only at first hand, an emotional tone that is a part of the setting for their child's school living. Besides this there is an advantage in being where the parents can meet the principal and perhaps the special teachers. If the interview is at school, they can more easily join in when that seems desirable. As a general thing they would not be able to come in on it unless it were there.

When the interview is at school, there are many points in favor of having it in the child's own room, unless the boy or girl is in high school and does not have a homeroom. Perhaps then it would be in the office of the teacher having the interview or in the room that serves that teacher both as classroom and office. With a child in the grades, where the greater part of his school life goes on in one room, that room is sure to be of great interest to the parents. All the little details of the youngster's school living are right there to see and to speak of: the place where he hangs his coat, the library corner with its books, the schoolroom pets if any, the materials and the places where they are kept, the books that are used for reading and for arithmetic, the musical instruments and the records that the children enjoy playing, the playhouse corner if it is a younger child, the blocks, and all the other things that he likes to play with.

Perhaps there is a lounge or a parents' room with easy chairs which can be used for interviews and which will be more comfortable than the classroom and perhaps more informal. Certainly one would want the parents to be as comfortable as possible, and anything that makes for informality and freedom in talking together seems a good idea. Whether that is best achieved in classroom or elsewhere is something to be thought out in one's own situation.

As for the disadvantages of having the interview at school, the principal one would be that the parents often find it hard to come. There may be younger children whose care must be provided for if the mother is to leave. There may be heavy home responsibilities—perhaps illness, perhaps a big family to look after, perhaps just more to do than there seems to be hours enough to get done—and the effort to get away to come to school for the interview is just one thing too many. The father may work at a distance from both home and school and to get home and change clothes to come to the school may be more than he feels he can undertake. Some may have work hours that make it impossible to get there. For some it may mean considerable distance to travel, particularly in the case of consolidated school districts. There may be those who have no means of transportation and must walk, or if there is a bus, it may be a difficult and time-consuming trip. Some may feel that their clothes are not good enough to wear to school and others may be timid about coming to a strange place. Some may have come once and found the labyrinth of halls in a big building confusing and more than they want to cope with again. Often, even though they come willingly enough, there may still be an uncomfortable self-consciousness from the fact that they are on strange ground and unsure of what to expect from the interview. Even so, the teacher may feel that the school is the place for the interview and may make every effort to have it there.

2. About having the interview at home.

Having the interview at home gives the teacher the opportunity to see the home setting and to hear about all sorts of things that might never come out at school; little things that touch the child's life, such as the pets in the family, the place where the child plays, the treasures that would be shown at home but probably never mentioned at school. Often an older boy or girl, particularly, will want a teacher to come to see those treasures, maybe a collection of some sort, maybe some rare

and favorite records, maybe a series of home movies. With the interview at home one can meet others in the family. Here, too, is an easy way for the child to be in on the interview, at least in part, and for others of the family to join in a friendly natural visit together. The teacher may see the child in a new light, as he acts as host with ease and aplomb, or retreats to the background in shyness and self-consciousness, or puts on a show to keep the center of attention.

Parents are much more likely to be themselves in the home setting and to feel much freer to talk than at school, and many times the teacher seems (perhaps is) very different there than in the classroom. Often both parents and child see her for the first time as a person with feelings and interests like their own, which puts the relationship on a different footing than before. The very fact that they have spoken their willingness that the teacher should come establishes a different relationship and the teacher becomes their guest coming through the doors of their home with their consent.

Sometimes, though, they are not so willing to have the teacher come and find some excuse each time the possibility of an interview at home is mentioned. Perhaps the house is meagerly furnished and they are sensitive about it. Or there may be some home situation which they do not want the teacher to see or know about. Or maybe it is the child who makes it plain that he is not happy with the thought of having the teacher come to his home, though he may be pleased with the idea of the parents coming to school.

Sometimes the interview at school paves the way for a home interview, and sometimes the one at home is the forerunner for the one at school. No one except the ones who are responsible for the planning can say whether there shall be both or, if so, which shall come first. One may be in a school where the administrator prefers that all interviews should be at school, feeling that it is better for the teachers not to go to the homes. Or the school may be one where going to the home for at least one interview has become the custom. The administrator may

be willing, even eager, to have it done because he feels that it makes for better understanding and closer relationship with the parents than can be had in any other way. The question of whether or not the teacher should accept invitations to a meal often comes up in relation to interviews at home. The administrator may feel that it is best not to accept them, thinking that parents may come to feel an obligation to give the invitation because others have, or that it might become a competitive sort of thing among the parents, or that a teacher might not have time to accept all the invitations and that the parents who were left out might feel slighted. Or it may be a school where the teacher is free to decide what to do as the different situations come up. Much depends on how the teacher and the parents feel about it. Some teachers feel perfectly free and comfortable about accepting some invitations and not others, depending on what it seems convenient and possible to do. Others are not comfortable about accepting any. And in just the same way, some parents would feel free about asking the teacher to come and others would hesitate. Whatever one can do easily and naturally and whatever makes for the best relationships is the thing to do.

3. About the chance meeting places.

Chance meeting places may include practically any place in the community: church, club, store, street, bus stop, filling station, public meeting place, social gathering, and so on. The advantages of these incidental meetings have already been mentioned. The main disadvantage of using such places for any real interviewing is that other people are likely to be nearby, so that there is little privacy for talking together. A teacher can hardly be too careful about making sure that any conversation about a child is for the parents' ears alone and that anything the parent says is not so commented upon that others can hear. These chance meeting places are usually not the best place for any long discussions. It is better, rather, to make an

272 WHAT? HOW? WHEN? WHERE?

appointment for continuing the talk at another time and place.

Whether it be school, home, or casual meeting spot, the place where teacher and parents can talk freely seems the one to choose. Probably for most teachers it will be a combination of them all.

D. Time for the Interview

This refers both to the time in the school year and to the day and hour. Obviously, the earlier in the year one can get acquainted with the parents the better, since it means knowing the child better straight away. If the teacher lives in the community or has taught in the school for some time, parents of some of the children will already be known, and she may want to have the first interviews with those whom she does not know. The open house, which many schools have early in the term, is a good time to meet parents and to pave the way for later interviews. It is not a good time to do actual interviewing, since attention needs to be given to all.

As soon as parents find that a teacher wants interviews, some will ask for an appointment and some will invite the teacher to their home. This makes an easy beginning, though often the ones that the teacher feels the greatest need for knowing may be among those who do not thus take the initiative. Usually, nothing much is gained by pushing, so it is probably best to begin where the way is open and to take a little longer to get appointments with the others.

A teacher who arranges a time for the interview that is convenient for both parents may be surprised to find how often both will come. Certainly, if the interview is at home, it is a matter of courtesy for the teacher's time to be suited to the parents' convenience, with the expressed hope of seeing both. This means the using of some evening and weekend time. That is a sacrifice of personal time, but many teachers have felt that the difference it made in working with the child fully com-

pensated, and many have made rich and enduring friendships that were an added reward.

Finding a time which is possible for working mothers is something to be given thought. These days when so many are working, any teacher is likely to have quite a few in the group. When one realizes how often such a mother finishes one day's work only to go home to another, it seems reasonable to be ready to try to work out a time when interviews will not add unduly to the load. Working hours may make the usual times for interviews impossible, yet there may be a great desire and need on the mother's part to talk things over with the teacher. If she is the sole support of the family, it may concern her that the child may not have all of the things that he needs to be comfortable with the other children. Or she may be concerned that more time cannot be spent with the child. Or there may need to be planning for out-of-school activities when she cannot be at hand. Anyway, there may be a great desire to talk with the teacher, and it is a matter of finding the time when it can be done. Maybe it will be before school in the morning. Maybe the only possible time will be as the mother is on her way to work in mid or late afternoon. Perhaps the principal has said that he would take the group for a half-hour or hour now and then, so that the teacher and that mother can have their interview, maybe it can be arranged for the time when some special teacher will have the group.

Perhaps the school is one where time is set aside for interviews once a month. Maybe it is an afternoon when substitute teachers or the special teachers or the Room Mother can take the group. Or the teacher may fit in an interview on certain days when the children go to gym and shop. Or the children may be dismissed early on a given afternoon to free the time for interviews. On the other hand, the administrator may feel that the school-time-off plan for interviews is likely to disrupt schoolwork and may prefer instead to provide clerical help for the teacher so that the out-of-school time usually given to routine reports may be used for interviews.

The school may be one where the administrator feels that the parents should come in only by appointment or it may be one where they are free to come and go as they will. In the latter case there is more opportunity for the brief, informal type of interview, even though it may still be the rule that appointments must be made for the longer ones. If the parents help around the school, there will be many times when teacher and parent can catch a few minutes together. There are all sorts of ways of arranging times if one sets about to find them. As the good purposes to be served by interviews become more apparent, the time given from one's own out-of-school hours comes to look less and less like a sacrifice and more and more like time spent in a way that brings rich returns.

E. How Many and Who Shall Initiate Them

No one can lay down a hard and fast rule for this any more than for the other things already mentioned. In schools where there is a required number of interviews for reporting purposes this would set the minimum, with probably as many more as one felt a need and had time for. There may be some children with special needs and, consequently, one might have more interviews with their parents than with others. However, just as soon as one thinks of interviews as something besides trouble-shooting there will be an equalizing of interview opportunity, and the parents of children who "have nothing the matter with them" will have a chance to talk with the teacher, too. When the idea of teacher-parent interviews gets well established on a friendly basis, with the purpose of talking about anything that concerns the children and not just about problems and difficulties, the number to have seems to take care of itself. So does the matter of who will initiate them.

At first it is natural for the teacher to take the lead, since parents often hesitate to ask for time, or feel that if the teacher wants to see them they will hear about it. Sometimes it takes quite a while for them to get over the idea that if they are asked

to come for an interview it means trouble, or that they should ask for the teacher's time only when there is a difficulty to be discussed. Once they get the idea that the teacher wants to know them and is interested in talking about plenty besides trouble, they are likely to feel quite free and easy about saying that they would like to drop in, or just doing it, or suggesting that the teacher "come over to the house." It becomes so much a matter of mutually working together for the good of the youngster that there is no standing on ceremony about who shall take the lead.

Frequently the interview will be initiated by someone other than either teacher or parent. Often this third party will be the administrator. The parent may phone or come in about something that he thinks the teacher should talk over. The administrator may have met the parent casually, at club or church or on the street, and, when some question came up, may have said, "I'll have the teacher call and make an appointment to talk with you about that." Or something about a child may come to the administrator's attention as he watches the children on the playground or in the gym or in the classroom, and he may suggest that the teacher see the parents about that. Or, if the parent goes to the guidance counsellor about something that turns out to be a schoolroom matter, the counsellor may suggest an interview with the teacher.

Often it is the secretary in the principal's office who initiates the interview. A secretary who has an understanding of what interviews are all about and who is alert can be very helpful in encouraging parents to come to talk with the teacher. For example, if a parent telephones to complain about something that has happened to the child, the secretary may suggest that it would be a good idea to talk with the child's teacher, and may offer to make the appointment. Or, if a parent phones or comes in to ask a question about the child's work, the secretary might suggest that the teacher is the one who can explain it in detail. A secretary has many contacts with parents which can be turned to good interviewing purposes, and a teacher does well to

The school may be one where the administrator feels that the parents should come in only by appointment or it may be one where they are free to come and go as they will. In the latter case there is more opportunity for the brief, informal type of interview, even though it may still be the rule that appointments must be made for the longer ones. If the parents help around the school, there will be many times when teacher and parent can catch a few minutes together. There are all sorts of ways of arranging times if one sets about to find them. As the good purposes to be served by interviews become more apparent, the time given from one's own out-of-school hours comes to look less and less like a sacrifice and more and more like time spent in a way that brings rich returns.

E. How Many and Who Shall Initiate Them

No one can lay down a hard and fast rule for this any more than for the other things already mentioned. In schools where there is a required number of interviews for reporting purposes this would set the minimum, with probably as many more as one felt a need and had time for. There may be some children with special needs and, consequently, one might have more interviews with their parents than with others. However, just as soon as one thinks of interviews as something besides trouble-shooting there will be an equalizing of interview opportunity, and the parents of children who "have nothing the matter with them" will have a chance to talk with the teacher, too. When the idea of teacher-parent interviews gets well established on a friendly basis, with the purpose of talking about anything that concerns the children and not just about problems and difficulties, the number to have seems to take care of itself. So does the matter of who will initiate them.

At first it is natural for the teacher to take the lead, since parents often hesitate to ask for time, or feel that if the teacher wants to see them they will hear about it. Sometimes it takes quite a while for them to get over the idea that if they are asked

to come for an interview it means trouble, or that they should ask for the teacher's time only when there is a difficulty to be discussed. Once they get the idea that the teacher wants to know them and is interested in talking about plenty besides trouble, they are likely to feel quite free and easy about saying that they would like to drop in, or just doing it, or suggesting that the teacher "come over to the house." It becomes so much a matter of mutually working together for the good of the youngster that there is no standing on ceremony about who shall take the lead.

Frequently the interview will be initiated by someone other than either teacher or parent. Often this third party will be the administrator. The parent may phone or come in about something that he thinks the teacher should talk over. The administrator may have met the parent casually, at club or church or on the street, and, when some question came up, may have said, "I'll have the teacher call and make an appointment to talk with you about that." Or something about a child may come to the administrator's attention as he watches the children on the playground or in the gym or in the classroom, and he may suggest that the teacher see the parents about that. Or, if the parent goes to the guidance counsellor about something that turns out to be a schoolroom matter, the counsellor may suggest an interview with the teacher.

Often it is the secretary in the principal's office who initiates the interview. A secretary who has an understanding of what interviews are all about and who is alert can be very helpful in encouraging parents to come to talk with the teacher. For example, if a parent telephones to complain about something that has happened to the child, the secretary may suggest that it would be a good idea to talk with the child's teacher, and may offer to make the appointment. Or, if a parent phones or comes in to ask a question about the child's work, the secretary might suggest that the teacher is the one who can explain it in detail. A secretary has many contacts with parents which can be turned to good interviewing purposes, and a teacher does well to

make certain the secretary knows that opportunities to talk with the parents are welcomed.

Sometimes it will be the child himself who takes the initiative in getting teacher and parent together. He may, without the formality of consulting the parent, suggest that the teacher come home with him. Many teachers of young children have learned to make a discreet telephone call to find out if the parent is aware of the invitation. Often an older child will urge that the parents get acquainted with some favorite teacher.

It seems to matter very little who takes the initiative in the getting together, though, in the long run, it is essentially the teacher who sets the tone of the whole relationship and who, by very virtue of being the teacher, is in the place of leadership.

F. Length of the Interview

This, like everything else, depends on circumstances, but a nice balance is needed between hurrying things along and letting them drag out unduly. Certainly the teacher would want parents to feel that there is ample time for talking things over in leisurely fashion. When a hurried feeling creeps in, it is likely that the parents will not speak of many of the things that may occur to them because they feel that they should not take the time. Often it is these very things that it would be helpful to hear. At the same time, letting the talk drag along into time-consuming and often extraneous detail is no help to anyone. It is the teacher who must be responsible for keeping the conversation from wandering down too many by-paths, whether it is taken there by the parents or by the teacher herself.

Perhaps the teacher will find it necessary to schedule interviews rather closely in order to get around to all the parents within a reasonable number of weeks. However, setting them too closely together all too often leaves one concerned that the one going on will not be over in time for the next to begin. When the teacher's eye is on the clock, a sensitive parent very quickly catches the feeling of being pushed out. A cushion of

time between interviews, if one is having more than one on the same day, makes for ease of mind.

Although no one can really set the length of time that an interview should run, it does seem that anything under a half-hour would be such a start-stop sort of thing that it would be hardly worth the parent's time to come. And, at the other extreme, it seems that an hour or so is likely to be long enough and that one does well to close the interview before everyone is worn out with too long a stretch of talking together. If there is more to be said it is usually best to do it at a later time, when everyone has had time to think over what has already been said. It all depends on where the talking is being done, what is being talked about, how helpful it is to do it, and how much interest there is in it. Of course, there are some practical aspects to be considered. When it is after school hours, the janitor usually has to close up at some given time, and parents and teacher usually have to get on home for supper. If it is during school hours the arrangements made for the care of the group would set certain limits. If it is at home there is often more leeway, but a teacher would want to be very sure neither to rush away nor to overstay the welcome. One soon becomes sensitive to the little cues which suggest that it is time to be stopping. All of which means that one interview may be short and another long, and that common sense, good judgment, and sensitivity to the parents' feelings must be the guide to show the teacher what is best for any one interview.

G. Making Arrangements for the Interview

This has to do with all of the many things that go into the getting ready for any one interview, so that everyone will be comfortable and the talking together will be useful. Some of the things to be thought about are little ones, but they are by no means insignificant if they add to the ease and freedom with which the teacher and parent can talk together.

1. Making the appointment.

If there is an open house for starting off the school year, perhaps the administrator will speak of the teacher-parent interviews as something that he feels are very important and will mention his hope that parents will feel free to ask for an appointment at any time. Or he may say that each teacher will have certain days when appointments can be made, or that when the teacher is ready to see the parents they will be notified. Whatever the plan is, it helps the parents to know about it and to be given the telephone number and the proper extension if they are to call for the appointment. If the school does not have open house, perhaps there is a school bulletin in which the administrator will mention the plan for interviews. Perhaps he will mention them in an opening-of-school letter to the parents. Or the individual teacher may be expected to speak to them about it.

In the latter case a teacher may want to send a letter to all of the parents as soon as school opens (with the administrator's approval, of course), saying that she hopes to meet them soon and to have frequent talks with them about their child's school doings as the year goes on. She may mention that she will be in touch with them later about an appointment, but that they should feel perfectly free to call for one at any time or to send word by the youngster that they would like to come in. Such a note lets everyone know that interviews are in the offing, then no one need be disturbed when the word comes that the teacher would like to see them. Parents will not need to wonder about what it is that the teacher wants, because the note will have already pointed out that interviews are to talk about the child's school doings. It is a sort of friendly gesture which will open the way for interviews and set forth at the start that they are for everyone, not just for those whose child is in trouble.

If it is a group of young children, chances are the parents will be bringing them and the teacher can tell them directly

whatever is to be told about the interviews. Or there may be a room meeting of parents where the matter can be discussed. Often a teacher in high school who is starting off with interviewing finds that more explaining is necessary than would be the case with parents of younger children. On the whole, interviews with parents of high school youngsters tend to be fewer and farther between than with younger children, even though parents are just as interested as they ever were. They may be surprised to hear that the teachers want to talk with them.

If parents are free to call by telephone for appointments, calls will probably be taken in the administrator's office. It will be a big help to the secretary and a saving of time and confusion for everyone if the teacher will let her know when appointments can be made; on which days and at what hours. Or it may be that the teacher would prefer to know which parents have called before the appointment is made, so she can know how much time to allow and when it would be best to make it. Whatever way it is handled, if the secretary's voice and telephone manner of speaking is welcoming and pleasant, it can go a long way in making the parents feel comfortable about coming, just as a brusque and curt manner can make them wonder whether they really are wanted.

When it is the teacher who is asking for an interview, it is best to do it in the way that is most natural and easy. The teacher of older children may ask them to deliver the message, leaving it to them to arrange the appointment. This brings them in as part of it all. One may want to go further and talk over with them the things to bring up in the interview to get their suggestions. With younger children, sending a note home may be the best way of getting word to their parents. Here, too, one can bring the youngster in on it by telling him what is in the note. The note itself, by the very way it is worded, can convey a feeling of friendliness that leaves the parents in no doubt of their welcome and that sets the tone for the interview. There is no need for it to be formally written—just a natural, pleasant, friendly note—but the teacher should be sure that it sounds like an invitation

and not a summons. It is a thoughtful thing to do to give a choice of possible times, since parents, too, are busy people. Often the interview appointment will be made informally, as teacher and parents meet one place or another. It is a good habit to jot down such an appointment, so that there will be no danger of the day and the parent arriving while the teacher is elsewhere because she has forgotten it.

If the interview is to be at home, the teacher may want to telephone to make the appointment, to be sure that the visit will be a welcome one and that the time has been arranged to suit the parents' convenience. Whether the interview be at school or home, or whether the appointment be made by telephone, note, or word of mouth makes less difference than that it be done in the way that is thoughtful and considerate; a way which makes the parents feel sure of their welcome.

2. Getting ideas together.

Certainly a teacher would want to come to an interview with thought clear and ideas in order about the youngster whose parents she is to see. The interview itself is no time for searching around in memory for this detail or that concerning the youngster and his work or about previous talks with his parents. Thinking in advance can save many regrets that something had been forgotten which the parent had told before and had every reason to expect one to know, or that some important item about the child's progress had been overlooked, or that some home detail had become attached in thought to another child instead of this one. It is not surprising that a teacher with a roomful of children should forget or misplace some details, and this is a good reason for getting them in order before the interview.

For one thing, it is best to be up to date on all the information about the child that is at hand. This may mean re-reading any available records. Even if one is pretty sure of what is in the records, re-reading often brings up some forgotten item or serves to re-emphasize some significant point. If there has been a previ-

ous interview, a mental review of this is a help, and going back to notes one may have made immediately afterwards will probably serve to bring the whole interview to mind. Naturally, the teacher will review in thought any information she has about the home, its location, other children in the family, the father's occupation, the mother's occupation if she works outside the home, relatives in the home, any special family interests, and so on. This obviates any need for asking parents to repeat information already given and so is a matter of courtesy, besides being a mark of the teacher's interest. Further, it furnishes a background from which she may talk and to which she may relate whatever is said.

Thinking over details of the child's school living, too, gives useful background. If the boy or girl whose parents are coming in is an older one, in high school perhaps, it is the natural thing to talk with him (or her) about what would be of the greatest interest to the parents, what the student would like them to see or hear about, and what he feels would be helpful to have the teacher bring up for discussion. If the child is in the grades, all the way down to kindergarten and nursery school, the teacher may want to talk over with him, too, what he would like his parents to see in the room set-up; what of his painting, clay work, or what-not he would like to have shown; and, if he has come to the place of being concerned with school achievement, what he thinks should be said about his progress. Perhaps there will be interesting incidents that the teacher wants to be sure to relate, bits of accomplishments she wants to tell about, or some special interest or ability she wants to mention.

There may be points where help is needed, and the teacher may want to have in mind questions to ask, if there is opportunity; or maybe suggestions in readiness to offer, if they seem needed and wanted. As the interview progresses it may seem wise neither to ask the questions nor to offer the suggestions, but having thought about it ahead of time helps one to know what to say and what not to. One may want to have samples of the child's work at hand to show, or records out of the files ready for quick reference.



The teacher may want to make some brief notes ahead of time of things to keep in mind for the interview and points to bring up. It is not intended that these should be used as an outline in any way, nor that they should even be followed if something else seemed better to do; only that they will help to organize thinking and serve as a reminder of things that it may be useful to bring out and that might easily be forgotten.

In making the appointment with the parents, a teacher may want to suggest that it would be helpful to hear, when they come to the interview, about the child's special interests at home, or about his feelings about school, or about any suggestions they have for making his school life more useful or more to his liking. She would need to be watchful not to make it sound as if the parents were being given a homework assignment and not even to mention it to those who might shy away from coming at all because they felt that they might not be able to give what the teacher wants. For some parents it would add to confidence instead of lessening it to feel that there was something definite that they could bring to the interview; to feel that they knew something, at least, about what would be discussed.

One may be in a school where the administrator likes to know ahead of time what the teacher intends to talk about with the given parents. It can be very helpful to get his point of view and any information that he has that might affect the discussion. Besides, it gives the administrator an opportunity to speak of any matters he would like to have the teacher bring to the parents' attention. Even though the administrator does not ask that he be told what the teacher has in mind to talk about, he will usually appreciate a teacher's volunteering the information.

All of this applies to the interview that is planned ahead of time. For those that come up on the spur of the moment one has to gather ideas together on the spot, but all the thinking in preparation for the planned-for interview helps with the casual ones. There need be nothing formal or hard or exacting about it. It is just a matter of keeping ideas about each of the children sorted out and gathered together with the child. This is a help in the

interview and, in turn, the interview is a help in keeping the facts and ideas together.

3. Helping parents find the place.

If the parents come to school for the interview, it is common courtesy to arrange so that they can get to the place where it is to be held with a minimum of difficulty. The maze of hallways in a strange building, with doors one after another on each side and all looking pretty much alike, is enough to discourage parents who are coming for a first interview. If they have forgotten the number of the room, or if they never knew it, they must go peering into one after another to find a teacher who looks as if she expects someone. If the administrative office is within easy sight as parents come into the building, the easiest arrangement may be to let the secretary know which ones are expected and when they are to come, and to ask her to call when they arrive. The teacher may want to be on hand at the office to greet them, or perhaps, if the interview is during school hours, to have their child there to meet them and bring them to the room. If the child is too young, one can sometimes borrow a child from an older group for the service.

4. Thinking of the parents' comfort.

When one has arranged for parents to come for an interview, it is friendly and courteous to think of what can be done to make them comfortable while they are there. The little details of where to sit, what chairs to use, the lighting, ventilation, and so forth, are important because they have a great bearing on physical comfort. One may not be able to provide easy chairs, but one can be sure parents do not face a glare of light, or sit close to a hot radiator, or have cold wind blowing down their backs. It is a mark of thoughtfulness to arrange so that a tall parent does not have to double up on a low chair and that a short one does not sit on a high chair with feet hardly touching the floor. If it is a

hot day, a glass of cold water is usually welcome. If it is a cold one and parents are wearing heavy coats, they will be glad to have a chance to take them off before the talk begins. These all are little things, but anything that is a mark of thoughtful consideration is important no matter how little it may be.

There is the matter, too, of where the teacher will sit. Some parents feel more at ease if the teacher is not sitting behind the desk. Maybe this is the hold-over of a childhood fear, and the teacher may seem less teacherish away from the desk. The thing to do is whatever is most natural and easy.

If the teacher knows that the parents are coming at a given time, she can usually arrange so that the interview can go on without interruption. She is likely to know what the common interruptions will be and how to forestall them. If there are reports that are regularly called for at the time the parents will be there, maybe they can be delivered before they come. If there are likely to be telephone calls, perhaps the office can be asked to hold them until the interview is over. If other teachers drop in during the interview, they will probably apologize for the interruption and leave. One can well understand the parents' feelings of dissatisfaction when first one thing and then another claims the teacher's attention, with too frequent, "Now, let me see, we were saying . . ." The one interruption that often seems hard to avoid is the custodian's cleaning of the floors, but certainly one would want to avoid the need for moving from hither to yon while the cleaning goes on. A teacher who is on friendly terms with the custodian (and it is a good idea to be) can sometimes get him to exchange the time of cleaning with another room to avoid interrupting the interview.

Promptness is a great asset whether the interview is at school or at home. It is something less than courteous for the parents to arrive and have to wait while the teacher finishes up half a dozen things before she is ready to begin the interview. If the parents are not on time, a teacher often has to be watchful not to show annoyance. There may have been a good reason. It is true that it may shorten the time of talking together, since it is

not fair to encroach on the time of the next interview, if there is another one. If the teacher has made some other time commitment, the parents probably will take her explanation in good part, knowing that it was their delay that took the time. The main thing is to be sure not to make the parents feel like a child who has come late to school.

If the interview is at home, the teacher does well to look into the means of transportation and the time it takes to make the trip, so that she can arrive at the appointed time. The question of what to wear when going to the home often comes up. The only answer can be to wear what seems appropriate to the occasion and what one will feel comfortable and at ease in, bearing in mind that a youngster does want to be proud of his teacher. It is the friendliness and ease and not the clothes in themselves that tell the story, just as in all of the interview arrangements.

H. Conduct of the Interview

This has to do with getting started, getting stopped, and all that comes between. Any interview falls naturally into those three major parts. It need not be a cut and dried start-go-stop matter, and one would never want either the starting or stopping or the going either to be obvious or abrupt. When a teacher can get off to a smooth, comfortable start and can come to the end just as smoothly, it can help greatly toward the parents' feeling that it was good to have been there. This is assuming, of course, that all of the talking that goes on will be what the parents want to talk about. The conduct of the interview lies pretty much in the teacher's hands, because she arranged the appointment and because it is more or less natural for the parents to look to the teacher to take the lead, at least in getting under way.

1. Getting started.

Many teachers have wondered how to get under way; how to get past those first few moments when teacher looks at parents

and parents look at teacher and each wonders what the other has in mind and who will start. Certainly it is better to do the natural, easy, gracious thing; to start showing as quickly as possible that this is nothing stiff and formal, but a friendly informal talk together. It helps sometimes to think of the parents as one's guests if the interview is at school, or of oneself as the guest if the interview is at home, then to do what one would do under those circumstances. No one can say what that would be. It might be comments on the weather. It might be mention of something one knows the parents are interested in; maybe the new school building, or the local elections, or some other event of interest. It might be an expression of appreciation of the parents' coming, or, if the interview is at home, of their being willing for the teacher to come, and of how glad one is of the opportunity to get acquainted.

Often teacher and parents find some common interest in the first few moments of chatting while everyone is getting settled. It is well for the teacher to let parents know that she is not so teacherish that she can speak of nothing but teaching. One needs to be watchful, though, to move on from the preliminaries without unduly dragging them out. The parents know in general that they have come (or the teacher has come) to speak about the youngster. The teacher is the one to get about it. If the interview is of a general nature, she may want to mention the enjoyment of having the child in school. Perhaps some of his work will have been kept near at hand to be shown and spoken of in the first few moments. This is always an easy takeoff. When wraps are out of the way, the parents may like to go around the room to see the work that is up and to get the lay of the land.

If the parents (or parent) asked for the interview, it is natural and courteous to give them the opportunity at once to speak of what is in mind. If the teacher asked the parents to come in for discussion of some special matter, they may be a little apprehensive because of not being fully aware of what it is, and she may want to get right to the point, starting with a direct, "I know you must wonder why I asked you to come in," and going on from

there. Even though this is a direct approach, one can be easy and gracious about it. Sometimes teachers plunge in and state why they wanted the interview in such a businesslike way that it sounds cold and abrupt and not very friendly. The interview does have a purpose to be accomplished, but abruptness does not accomplish it.

If one is really interested in the child as an individual and genuinely desirous of understanding him, there are always plenty of easy, spontaneous things to say about him and what he does, things a parent is glad enough to hear. As one goes on interviewing one develops a helpful sensitivity to parents' feelings, and one discerns with growing accuracy what to say and do to get things on an easy footing. One thing is sure; starting off with criticism of the child or of the parents is not the way to get on that footing. One can readily understand why they would become resistant and defensive if the first thing they hear when they sit down has to do with where the teacher feels they and the child have fallen short.

If the interview is at home, it is still the teacher's responsibility to see that preliminary chatting does not drag on and replace the intended interview. It is easy enough to get the conversation around to the child because of most parents' willingness to talk about their children. Perhaps the child is present when the teacher arrives and is shy and withdrawing in spite of parental admonitions to say this or do that. Often an older child, even a teen-ager, is embarrassed with the admonitions of parents who seem not to realize how nearly grown up he is, or who are themselves a little embarrassed because they do not know how to get into conversation. It is the teacher who has to save the day, being watchful neither to rebuke the parents nor to take on their tone of speaking to the big boy or girl as a child. Perhaps she will mention having looked forward to the visit in order to hear more about some project she knows is going on, or in some other way make reference to work for which she obviously has respect.

If parents begin at once to voice their apprehension and to apologize for their child's behavior and their own failure as par-

ents (as they often do)*, the teacher has a good opportunity to provide some of the reassurance that they need with an easy, friendly statement about something the child has done well at school. It often takes parents a long time to get used to the idea of a teacher who neither blames nor condemns and who is as ready to speak of a youngster's strength as of his weaknesses.

When parents come to an interview and it is obvious that they have a lot on their minds, the interview can start right there, with the teacher giving courteous and interested attention while they speak of what troubles them. Sometimes they have something in mind that is not easy to discuss, and a teacher may find it best to chat along casually and to feel around for some clue that will show what direction to lead the conversation.

If some other person is in on the interview, such as the administrator, some specialist, or another teacher, the natural thing, of course, is to start off with introductions, if these are necessary. The teacher can then tell why the other person is in, with appreciation of their coming.

At school or at home, whatever kind of interview it may be, the point is to get on a friendly footing at once. Taking a feeling of genuine friendliness and interest to the interview helps one to know what to say to give the parents a feeling of ease.

2. Between the starting and the stopping.

One might think of this as the body of the interview, but all that is said while teacher and parents are together is part of the interview. What is said here has to do with the main things talked about and the give and take during the conversation.

All too often "problems" are the principal, if not the sole, subject of teacher-parent interviews to the exclusion of the child's achievements, accomplishments, and interests. Interviews with parents to learn from them what has caused whatever good adjustment their children show have yielded such useful information that it suggests making this inquiry a more common part of regular interviews. With the encouragement of a teacher's

acceptance that they have attained a measure of success, parents have revealed with ease and freedom their ways of rearing their child, which are often enlightening and instructive. Not all children could be grouped as well-adjusted, but all children have some strengths. Conversation about these—how they came about and what both teacher and parents might do to nurture and foster them—is one useful thing to talk about in interviews.

This is by no means to suggest that problems be ignored or that they be neglected in the more pleasant contemplation of the child's strengths. It is to suggest strongly, though, that the strengths be not ignored either, and that "problems" might better be approached via the consideration of the strength on which one may build. Some parents, of course, will be disturbed and will need to talk of the things that bother them even before they give thought to those about which they feel some satisfaction. A teacher does well, though, not to assume that parents are always disturbed about their children. Plenty of them, despite moments of disturbance, are entirely happy with their youngsters, enjoy them, are glad that they have them, and take their bringing up in stride.

When parents feel that a teacher accepts them as they are, they will bring up their problems—the things which worry them, the things about which they want some help, the things that baffle them. A teacher is likely to have a few to mention, too. Certainly these are the things to talk about and to work on together. So is the progress the child is making as seen by both teacher and parents. It takes it all—the strengths, the weaknesses, the progress—to really get a well rounded picture. It is fortunate if the teacher-parent relationship is on such a basis that there can be free discussion about the school, about the things the parents like and the things they do not like, and about those that they question. One would hope for enough confidence in the relationship for the teacher to be able to make explanations with no feeling of defensiveness and no irritation at the questioning, and for the parents to be equally willing for the teacher to question.

As the talking together goes on, one thing naturally will lead

to another and, unless a teacher is watchful, conversation will get off on some side topic that may be interesting but not pertinent to what is being discussed. It is usually easy enough to bring it back to the point with a natural, "I wanted to ask you something more about what we were speaking of a moment ago," or something to that effect. Here the before-interview thinking about what one wants to accomplish helps in knowing which are the main points to keep in mind.

Having an eye on main points also helps in the matter of deciding which comments to pick up for further mention and which to let slip by. Many things will be said in any interview that will be significant as clues to the child-parent relationship, or that will throw light on the underlying philosophy of family living, or that will clarify the whole family situation out of which the child's behavior comes. Yet one may never pick them up for comment. Often the parent will make a negative statement which may be a trial balloon sent up to see if the parent dares go into things that are stirring below the surface. If negative feelings are there, it is better if they come out, and it may very well be that if the teacher listens quietly the parent will go on speaking of things that have great bearing on the teacher's understanding of the child.

When it comes to offering suggestions, the teacher who is a good listener often finds that parents will advance their own suggestions for the next thing to be done. The more a teacher realizes how hard it is to know a total situation, the more watchful she is likely to become about being too free with suggestions. Having a chance to talk about the things that concern them and to consider different possibilities for handling them is often what the parents need and want, rather than definite suggestions. As the interview goes on the teacher can add comments about the school side of what is being talked about, thus rounding out the home-school picture for the parents. Sometimes the teacher may comment favorably on some plan of action the parents have thought of or on some course of action that they have followed. Most parents can use quite a bit of such encouragement. Often

the teacher may wish to ask the parents' point of view on something that has happened at school. They may offer a helpful explanation on the behavior for which the teacher has been seeking a cause. Together teacher and parent may decide on the next steps to take. This planning together is a far cry from the idea that the teacher should know all the answers. It bespeaks a give and take relationship in which both can and do learn.

In bringing out that the teacher does well to do a great deal of listening, and to be very cautious about outlining a definite course of action for the parents, and to avoid authoritatively saying that they should or should not do thus and so, it is not meant to suggest that she need sit through the interview as a passive listener, never offering a suggestion. It does not mean that if the parent asks the teacher's opinion it should never be given for what it is worth. The teacher has something to give, of course, since she is the person who has more intimate knowledge than anyone else can have of what goes on during the child's school hours and since, presumably, she has a broad general knowledge of children. It seems natural and reasonable that in the give and take of the ordinary interview a teacher should question, comment, and suggest, but not on the basis of condemning what the parents have done or claiming to have the answer as to what they should do. There are different ways of offering suggestions. To offer them as things the parents must do is one thing; to offer them as ideas which the parents might find useful is quite another thing, especially when it is made clear that the teacher recognizes fully that it is for the parent to decide what to do and that she is only suggesting, not instructing.

Sometimes, in an interview, parents complain about the child or others in the family. It is best not to let complaints go on beyond the point of their being useful information. One can sometimes stem the tide with a constructive comment about the child. If the complaints indicate a problem beyond the teacher's province to handle, she can suggest that it be talked over with the person in the school who is equipped to give the special help needed.

It usually helps a teacher in knowing which comments to pick up and which to let go, to keep the child and his doings as the focal point of the interview, since that is the purpose of having it in the first place. That prevents wandering down by-paths which the teacher is not in a position to explore.

3. Closing the interview.

It lies pretty much with the teacher to bring the interview to a close. No one can say in terms of minutes when that should be, but there are little signs that a teacher soon learns to recognize as meaning that the parents would like to be on their way. They begin to get fidgety, or look at their watches, or seem uneasy and nervous and at a loss for something to say. Or it may work the other way; they may be willing to stay on indefinitely, enjoying an attentive listener. Whatever the situation, there is an art in closing the interview in a smooth, easy fashion, keeping the way open for another visit.

Sometimes one can sum up what has been said and can add the suggestion, "Now the next time we can compare notes on the progress we see," or something of that sort. An abrupt "Our time is up" is not a very neat finish. If there is no move, the teacher's standing up with the comment, "I know you are busy and I appreciate your giving the time to come in," will bring the interview to an end. If the parent is one who continues talking regardless, one can begin walking toward the door. Sometimes one can say that the point the parent has just brought up is one that can be talked about later. Most parents will recognize the signs which indicate that the interview is over. If not, one may say that there is an appointment now with another parent, or that one has an appointment elsewhere (if that is true), or that the custodian will be coming in now to clean the rooms, or whatever the facts are. There is little to be gained by letting an interview drag on beyond its reasonable closing time. If the interview is at home, a teacher can tell pretty well when it is time to be going. It is best to get on the way before mealtime,

unless she is being asked to stay; to keep clear of the children's bedtime, unless asked to wait to continue talking thereafter; and to be sure that she is not keeping the parents from meeting some other appointment.

The general idea is to conclude before the interview peters out, but not to leave the parents feeling that the talk is unfinished, or that things are at loose ends. It is well not to conclude in any abrupt, brusque way, but smoothly, with the way open for another visit and with everyone glad to have had this one. With the last words said and wraps on, it seems a natural, gracious thing to do, if the interview is at school, to see the parents out of the building instead of leaving them to get out as best they can. These little thoughtful things give meaning to the words one says about being glad to have had them come.

It takes planning to have interviews that are useful. Good interviews do not just happen. There are many things that can be done to make them good, things that any teacher can learn to do. There are all of the details of when, how, where, and so on, which have been mentioned here. Then there are all of the details that have to do directly with the teacher-parent relationships, details that bear directly on feelings. These have been mentioned in passing in everything that has been discussed thus far; however, they are too important to leave with only passing mention, so the next chapter is given to their consideration.

13. Some do's and don't's

IF ONE COULD ONLY LOOK BELOW THE SURFACE and see all of the parents' feelings and all of the teacher's feelings and the effect of the things that are said and done in any interview, how enlightening it would be. Perhaps the feeling of discouragement that the parent brought and the feeling of not being quite equal to the job changes during the interview, even if ever so little. Perhaps a little of the parent's worry and anxiety lessens as talking together goes on. Perhaps there comes a feeling of satisfaction and joy in the child's achievement as the teacher speaks of the good work being done in school. The feeling may be one of relief that things seem to be going better than had been thought. Or there may be concern because the progress described is less than the parent supposed. There may be the question, probably unspoken, of whether the teacher has done all that she might. There may be a sudden welling up of irritation with the youngster for not having done better. Perhaps there is a feeling of great satisfaction in the teacher's interest, of appreciation for all the thought being given to the child, of encouragement at the teacher's spoken admiration of the way the child is being brought up. All these feelings

perhaps are mixed with others: of being glad to have a chance to talk things over, of being irritated by the way the teacher moves things around on the desk while talking, of liking the teacher's friendliness, of wishing that the teacher would finish talking, of satisfaction that the teacher seems to enjoy the youngster, and so on.

Some of the parents' feelings will show plainly enough. Some of them a teacher will learn to discern with pretty good accuracy, for one can grow in sensitivity to the little outward signs that reveal them. Some of them she will catch with intuitive understanding and some of them she may only wonder about and perhaps never know. It is to the feelings, though, that a teacher does well to give attention, looking straight through the behavior to them. As she does this it becomes easier to be accepting; easier to talk with the parents without blaming them for what they do, because she understands that they can only do as they feel. Then, her thought will turn more to the ways they are feeling than to the things they "ought" to be doing. Instead of thinking about advice to be given, she will think more about the relationships that are necessary if teacher and parents are to talk and work together for the most good to the youngster.

Some suggestions about things that have to do with relationships are gathered together here. They are little things; some of them very little. They are things that are easy and natural to do when the teacher feels genuine friendliness toward the parents and really cares about how they feel and wants to work with them in an easy, comfortable, useful way. They are little thoughtful considerate things that one can do as the interview goes on, not just for the sake of making the interview go smoothly, but because here are people to be respected and liked and treated with consideration.

1. Be truthful and honest.

One can readily understand what a feeling of satisfaction it must give parents to know that when they ask the teacher a

question they will get an honest answer, to know that they will be told truthfully how their youngster is doing in school, to know that whatever the teacher says can be depended upon to be honestly spoken.

Sometimes the honest answer to a question has to be, "I don't know." Parents are pretty likely to respect such an answer when it is frankly given, especially if it is followed with the teacher's assurance of her willingness to find out or to talk over whatever the matter is. Or if it is something about which the teacher has an opinion, she can give it with the qualifying statement, "This is just my own opinion and only something for you to think about," making no pretense that it is the final answer. When a teacher can reach the point of honestly feeling that there is no one final answer to things, it becomes easy enough to say truthfully, "I can only tell you how it looks to me, but this is the way I see it." Often a teacher will feel it best not to give an opinion because she doesn't have sufficient information. A forthright statement such as, "I think I had better not say anything one way or the other, because I really do not know enough about it even to express an opinion," leaves the parents in no doubt as to why an opinion is withheld. Although they may wish they could have the opinion, the integrity of the teacher in withholding it and the honesty in telling why is pretty likely to add to their feeling of confidence that when an opinion is spoken it will be a thoughtful one.

Sometimes when one speaks of being truthful and honest with parents it is taken to be an admonition to face the music; to go ahead and say whatever unpleasant things are to be said. That does have to be done on occasion, but there are plenty of pleasant things to be truthful and honest about, too. A statement about Susie's interest in all of her art work, the care with which she does it, and the creative ability she shows in the doing may be just as much a statement of fact as that she shows not the slightest interest in arithmetic and does not seem to care whether she ever learns to spell or not. Being truthful and honest with the parents suggests the mention of whatever is going to be of

help to Susie. Being truthful and honest does not of necessity mean telling every detail of Susie's school living, or putting into words all of the feelings one may be having about Susie's parents. There are many things a teacher holds in reserve; and the parents, too, for that matter.

The point is to do the parents the honor not to camouflage, sugar-coat, flatter, mislead, or in any way to misrepresent things. When parents ask how Susie is doing in school, it is their right to be told. When a teacher is reporting on progress, the parents have a right to know what it is as she sees it. The more a teacher feels that any report on how a child is doing—whether it be in school subjects, in relationships with others, or in individual initiative and resourcefulness—is a tentative one which may change day by day, the more that teacher will feel it truthful to say that no report about a child should be thought of as final, but only as the present stage of progress.

The teacher's honesty and truthfulness in all that is said and done bespeaks an integrity that gives parents reason for trust and confidence.

2. Respect the parents' confidence.

Parents often reveal some of their innermost feelings in talking with their child's teacher. Under stress of their concern about the child they may speak of things of a very personal nature; things having to do with their own desires, or their own plans, or their own personal difficulties. They may reveal family matters which they would not wish noised abroad. A teacher does well to *hold in strictest confidence* all that is told in an interview, even though the things that are told touch only on the pleasant side of living. Holding them in confidence is a mark of respect to the parents who have spoken of things that are of great moment to them. Sometimes it is tempting to repeat something, because it makes a good story for a group laugh, or because it is so interesting that one wants to share it with another, or because it throws a light on the child's behavior and is enter-

taining to someone who knows the child or family. Putting herself mentally in the place of the parents concerned will soon show a teacher how they might feel if they were to hear of the telling and will give the test of whether or not it is the kindly, considerate thing to do.

There are many times when things told in an interview would be helpful knowledge for the principal or the guidance counsellor, if there is one. Repeating what has been told on a professional basis to the person concerned with the child's guidance is vastly different from repeating it in a gossiping way. The knowledge may very well be the means of greater help to the youngster, which will be indication enough that it should be told in professional confidence. There may be times, though, when the parent has asked that it not be repeated, or has told it in such a way that one knows he would not wish it to be. The teacher has to decide, then, whether the child's good demands that it be known or whether in the long run the purpose will be served better by keeping anything that is told inviolate, so that the parents will know without any doubt that the teacher will never betray their confidence. Even in schools where all of the interviews with parents are handled by a specialist instead of by the teacher, parents are still likely to speak of things to the child's teacher that do not come out in the talks with another. Sometimes the teacher can ask whether this or that, which she would not want to repeat without permission, may be told, explaining that it would be helpful to the principal or the counsellor to know about it. One can be guided by what seems best in a given situation. The point here is that consideration for the parents suggests a respect that would prevent any idle repetition of what they say in an interview.

3. Do not appear shocked by anything.

It is fine if a teacher not only shows no appearance of being shocked, but actually is not shocked by anything that is said.

It may be startling to hear that the teen-ager in one's group is spanked on the average of several times a week, and that the parent feels this is the only way to keep any semblance of control. It may astonish one to find that, in one family each of the four children, ranging from six to fourteen, must go to their rooms immediately after the evening meal and occupy themselves there until bedtime, unless they have made an appointment while at the table to see one or the other parent during the evening (both parents are writers and busy with their work). It may be surprising to learn of a child's being taught that one cannot always be honest and that the thing to do is to decide which things are best to be honest about and which do not matter. It may be a little astonishing to hear of pets numbering two dogs, four cats, several turtles, and three goats, with one of the latter being the favorite house pet and having the run of the place. It may be surprising to know that there is no fuss about the child coming to the table with dirty hands and face because the parents do not want to nag, or that the girl in the homemaking class "has gotten so fussy that she wants a bath every day," or that the parents of a young teen-ager feel that perhaps they should give her more time than they have before and so are trying to see her at least on alternate weekends, or that the only meal the family has together is Sunday dinner because of the different hours each one keeps, or that some parent "never could stand kids and never intended to have any and can hardly wait until they are grown up and gone."

These and many other things that are spoken of in an interview may occasion some surprise, or even shock, to the teacher who has different ideas than those expressed. However, a teacher who does much interviewing soon learns that a startled, shocked, surprised, disapproving reaction only serves to shut off abruptly what is being said. When a teacher can reach the point where she feels no necessity for sitting in judgment or deciding what is "right" or what is "wrong," it helps to reduce the shock. She can then listen and learn of ways of doing that otherwise she

taining to someone who knows the child or family. Putting herself mentally in the place of the parents concerned will soon show a teacher how they might feel if they were to hear of the telling and will give the test of whether or not it is the kindly, considerate thing to do.

There are many times when things told in an interview would be helpful knowledge for the principal or the guidance counsellor, if there is one. Repeating what has been told on a professional basis to the person concerned with the child's guidance is vastly different from repeating it in a gossipy way. The knowledge may very well be the means of greater help to the youngster, which will be indication enough that it should be told in professional confidence. There may be times, though, when the parent has asked that it not be repeated, or has told it in such a way that one knows he would not wish it to be. The teacher has to decide, then, whether the child's good demands that it be known or whether in the long run the purpose will be served better by keeping anything that is told inviolate, so that the parents will know without any doubt that the teacher will never betray their confidence. Even in schools where all of the interviews with parents are handled by a specialist instead of by the teacher, parents are still likely to speak of things to the child's teacher that do not come out in the talks with another. Sometimes the teacher can ask whether this or that, which she would not want to repeat without permission, may be told, explaining that it would be helpful to the principal or the counsellor to know about it. One can be guided by what seems best in a given situation. The point here is that consideration for the parents suggests a respect that would prevent any idle repetition of what they say in an interview.

3. Do not appear shocked by anything.

It is fine if a teacher not only shows no appearance of being shocked, but actually is not shocked by anything that is said.

It may be startling to hear that the teen-ager in one's group is spanked on the average of several times a week, and that the parent feels this is the only way to keep any semblance of control. It may astonish one to find that, in one family each of the four children, ranging from six to fourteen, must go to their rooms immediately after the evening meal and occupy themselves there until bedtime, unless they have made an appointment while at the table to see one or the other parent during the evening (both parents are writers and busy with their work). It may be surprising to learn of a child's being taught that one cannot always be honest and that the thing to do is to decide which things are best to be honest about and which do not matter. It may be a little astonishing to hear of pets numbering two dogs, four cats, several turtles, and three goats, with one of the latter being the favorite house pet and having the run of the place. It may be surprising to know that there is no fuss about the child coming to the table with dirty hands and face because the parents do not want to nag, or that the girl in the homemaking class "has gotten so fussy that she wants a bath every day," or that the parents of a young teen-ager feel that perhaps they should give her more time than they have before and so are trying to see her at least on alternate weekends, or that the only meal the family has together is Sunday dinner because of the different hours each one keeps, or that some parent "never could stand kids and never intended to have any and can hardly wait until they are grown up and gone."

These and many other things that are spoken of in an interview may occasion some surprise, or even shock, to the teacher who has different ideas than those expressed. However, a teacher who does much interviewing soon learns that a startled, shocked, surprised, disapproving reaction only serves to shut off abruptly what is being said. When a teacher can reach the point where she feels no necessity for sitting in judgment or deciding what is "right" or what is "wrong," it helps to reduce the shock. She can then listen and learn of ways of doing that otherwise she

would have no way of knowing were a part of the child's living and can become aware of parental feelings that throw considerable light on the things he does.

Sometimes there are parents who definitely want to shock the teacher, who enjoy "getting a rise," and who deliberately say things to see what will happen. Obviously this is a good time to preserve one's equilibrium and not get excited. There seems to be no good purpose served by having the parents feel that the teacher is astonished to think that they would do such a thing, or horrified that they should feel as they do, or so disapproving that she is all hot and bothered. A better purpose seems to be served when parents feel free to say anything they want to say in any way they want to say it, and when the teacher stays on an even keel while it is said.

4. Don't jump to conclusions.

Often a teacher feels pretty sure of what a parent is going to say before the parent gets it said. He may go on and say what she expected, but frequently it turns out to be something quite different. Sometimes a parent comes in worried and anxious about something, and the teacher feels pretty sure of what is causing the trouble. Listening as the parent tells about it may show that she was right, or it may show that it was not at all what she had thought. Often a parent makes some statement and the teacher has no question about what was meant, only to find out later that the parent meant one thing and the teacher thought he meant another. It is so easy to jump to conclusions and so much wiser not to.

Often it is the feeling that the time for talking together is short and that every minute must count which makes a teacher interrupt with, "I see what you mean." Or it may be the eagerness to have the parent feel that one understands them that brings the, "I know, I know," which so often shuts off what is being said. (If the teacher already knows what is meant, why go on talking?) A question, such as "You felt it was pretty hard?" or

"You wondered what to do?" or whatever seems appropriate to what is being said, would not only convey the understanding of the parents' feeling but would encourage rather than shut off the further talking that may reveal something very different than was first thought. Many teachers have had the experience, as parents talked, of thinking first "I see what they mean," and then, as more talk went on, "Oh, no, that is not what I thought they meant," and then, many more words later, "My, my, how glad I am I kept still."

Sometimes the feeling of time pressure makes one finish sentences for the parent who speaks slowly or has difficulty finding words. Often a teacher's thought jumps ahead of the words being said and it becomes a habit to finish sentences without ever knowing whether that is what the parent would have said or not. The person who begins a sentence is in the best position to finish it, and it is obviously more courteous to let him do so.

It takes a great deal of listening to know what is meant by the words that are said and often a great deal of willingness to explain and to talk things over. To the parent who is speaking, the words may, and often do, have a very different meaning than they have for the teacher who is hearing them. And, similarly, the words the teacher speaks may carry a meaning to the parents hearing them that the teacher never intended. Thus, the parent speaks of the teen-ager getting too independent and the teacher speaks up for letting her be independent, the parent argues that you can't let them get too independent and the teacher insists that they must have the chance to be so, and neither realizes that the word "independent" meant "staying out late nights" to the parent and "taking responsibility within reasonable limits" to the teacher. It is better to be ready to listen, ready to explain, and ready to talk things over, but very slow to jump to conclusions.

This is true, too, when it comes to offering suggestions or advice about what parents might do in any given situation. Maybe they could do what the teacher has in mind, maybe not. Jumping to conclusions is something a wise teacher is very careful to avoid.

would have no way of knowing were a part of the child's life and can become aware of parental feelings that throw considerable light on the things he does.

Sometimes there are parents who definitely want to shock the teacher, who enjoy "getting a rise," and who deliberately say things to see what will happen. Obviously this is a good time to preserve one's equilibrium and not get excited. There seems to be no good purpose served by having the parents feel that the teacher is astonished to think that they would do such a thing or horrified that they should feel as they do, or so disapproving that she is all hot and bothered. A better purpose seems to be served when parents feel free to say anything they want to say in any way they want to say it, and when the teacher stays calm and even keel while it is said.

4. Don't jump to conclusions.

Often a teacher feels pretty sure of what a parent is going to say before the parent gets it said. He may go on and say what she expected, but frequently it turns out to be something quite different. Sometimes a parent comes in worried and anxious about something, and the teacher feels pretty sure of what is causing the trouble. Listening as the parent tells about it may show that she was right, or it may show that it was not at all what she thought. Often a parent makes some statement and the teacher has no question about what was meant, only to find out later that the parent meant one thing and the teacher thought it meant another. It is so easy to jump to conclusions and so much wiser not to.

Often it is the feeling that the time for talking together is short and that every minute must count which makes a teacher interrupt with, "I see what you mean." Or it may be the eagerness to have the parent feel that one understands them that brings the, "I know, I know," which so often shuts off what is being said. (If the teacher already knows what is meant, why go on talking?) A question, such as "You felt it was pretty hard?"

ster, or tell about things that he says, or relate details of some of his enterprises—not things about which they need special help, but things that they like to talk about because they are part of everyday family affairs. When one thinks of all these things as part of the child's living, they take on an importance that makes it easy to give them one's respectful serious attention; never belittling or brushing them off but listening and being glad that the parent feels they are worthy of mention.

Giving serious attention to what the parents have to say does not mean going to the extreme of so emphasizing the importance of every little thing that the interview gets heavy and somewhat lugubrious. One can take what is said seriously, in the sense of treating it respectfully, but can still keep a light touch that begets the feeling that there is always a way to work out whatever may be troublesome and that there is also a great deal about the youngster to be enjoyed.

6. Don't be authoritative.

It is a wise teacher who stays well away from such words as, "I would do this," or "You ought to do that," or "You *never* should have done *that*," or, "Now this is the thing to do." Words such as these tell pretty plainly that a teacher is trying to do for the parents something that they must do for themselves, which is to decide on their own ways of doing. Instead of trying to decide what they should do and giving them a recipe for doing it, a teacher does parents a better service by encouraging them in the feeling of confidence that they are fully equal to the occasion.

Sometimes, when parents are telling of the trouble that they have had about one thing or another, it is a temptation for the teacher to tell how beautifully that very thing was worked out at school or to say complacently, "Oh, we never have trouble with that here," with the implication that if the parent would do what the teacher does there would be less home trouble, too. This may very well be true, but real respect for the parents and

5. Take what parents say seriously.

One can readily understand why parents appreciate a teacher's taking what they have to say seriously enough to give it respectful attention and consideration. It is a matter of common courtesy to do so. Sometimes a teacher feels that treating the matter which troubles the parents lightly will relieve their anxiety. Instead, it may make them feel that the teacher does not understand them, or does not care, or does not know what to say and so pooh-poohs the seriousness of the thing they want to talk about.

Sometimes a teacher, trying to be on easy informal terms with parents, falls into a facetious, wise-cracking way of speaking that leaves them thinking that she is making fun of them, even though it was never intended. It is no help to parents to feel that they are being laughed at, or that what they have to say is being belittled, or that the thing which is of moment to them is being brushed off lightly. It gives little help to say, "Don't worry" when the parents are worrying, or to brush off their concern about something with, "Oh, I wouldn't let that bother me" when it *does* bother them. It may be very amusing to the teacher that the eleven-year-old Horace should insist upon changing his name to Karl and should continue to sign it so despite all parental protests and even threats of punishment. But it may be far from amusing to the mother who had wanted the boy named Horace for her father and hoped that he would be like him, and who abhors the name of Karl almost as much as she abhors the brother-in-law whose name it is and who is the boy's hero at the moment because of his wild driving, daredevil escapades, and colorful language. If the worry of that mother meets amusement from the teacher, the facts that would change the amusement to seriousness are pretty likely never to come into words for the teacher to know.

It may very well be that many of the things that the parents want to talk about seem to the teacher to be of little moment. They may recount things that they enjoy doing with the young-

a great variety of experience, perhaps with some explanation of how all the different experiences tie together and each helps the other. Some words may be said about the value of children learning self-direction as well as obedience. Mention may be made that a teacher can do a better job in helping children to learn when home and school work together. True, the parents may still be of the same mind when the words have been said. That is their privilege and there is little use to argue. It only tends to rouse resistance and antagonism.

8. Avoid teacherish, pedantic language.

The most profound ideas can be spoken in everyday language if one really understands the thought back of the words. There seems little to be gained by a flow of pedagogical language, which often makes parents feel that the teacher is only trying to show off superior knowledge even though that may not be the case at all. This is not meant to suggest that one should talk down to parents. Never. It is a pretty safe rule never to underestimate the intelligence of parents or child (or anyone else, for that matter). The point is that when teacher and parents talk together they can be natural and do it just as any friends would talk together, without using words that may serve to set up a barrier.

9. Be sympathetically understanding but not sentimental.

To be sympathetically understanding means to look through the things that the parents do and say to the way they feel, and to accept their feelings without blame or condemnation, to respect their right to have them, and to look upon it as reasonable that they should be whatever they are. It does not mean taking the parents' problems and worries and difficulties on as one's own, assuming a parental protecting attitude toward them, or indulging in self-pity with them. Even though she wants to be as helpful as possible, a teacher does well to look upon the parents'

consideration for them precludes making them feel inferior and inadequate.

A teacher needs to be watchful, too, that she does not make parents feel that they are being checked up on to see if they have followed suggestions that may have been given. When a teacher offers suggestions as just that and nothing more, it will lessen the temptation to check up to see if they were carried out or to feel put out if they were not. It is natural for a teacher to be interested in knowing whether suggestions have been useful and in knowing what happened next, and she will often want to ask about it, but it is more a matter of finding out whether the suggestions were practical and of being willing to talk further if the parents want to. A teacher who does not *feel* authoritative is not very likely to *act* authoritatively. It is the feeling on which one needs to keep an eye.

7. Avoid getting into arguments.

This is not meant to suggest that a teacher should agree or even appear to agree with everything the parents say. That would be both artificial and insincere. It means, rather, that she should avoid see-saw arguments, where each is only trying to convince the other and is more concerned with maintaining his own point of view than finding out why the other thinks as he does. Arguments sometimes are set off by some statement dropped by the parent in passing, such as: "Children would be far better off if the schools would cut out the fads and frills," or "There's no use to spend time reasoning with a child, tell him what to do and see that he does it," or "It's the teacher's job to see that the children learn what they are supposed to learn."

A teacher is fortunate who has reached the point of being able to let debatable remarks roll off without bristling. The remarks may very well be stored away for talking about later, at a more timely moment. Conversation then may give the teacher insight into what the parents look upon as "fads and frills." There may be a chance to comment on the benefits to the children of having

a great variety of experience, perhaps with some explanation of how all the different experiences tie together and each helps the other. Some words may be said about the value of children learning self-direction as well as obedience. Mention may be made that a teacher can do a better job in helping children to learn when home and school work together. True, the parents may still be of the same mind when the words have been said. That is their privilege and there is little use to argue. It only tends to rouse resistance and antagonism.

8. Avoid teacherish, pedantic language.

The most profound ideas can be spoken in everyday language if one really understands the thought back of the words. There seems little to be gained by a flow of pedagogical language, which often makes parents feel that the teacher is only trying to show off superior knowledge even though that may not be the case at all. This is not meant to suggest that one should talk down to parents. Never. It is a pretty safe rule never to underestimate the intelligence of parents or child (or anyone else, for that matter). The point is that when teacher and parents talk together they can be natural and do it just as any friends would talk together, without using words that may serve to set up a barrier.

9. Be sympathetically understanding but not sentimental.

To be sympathetically understanding means to look through the things that the parents do and say to the way they feel, and to accept their feelings without blame or condemnation, to respect their right to have them, and to look upon it as reasonable that they should be whatever they are. It does not mean taking the parents' problems and worries and difficulties on as one's own, assuming a parental protecting attitude toward them, or indulging in self-pity with them. Even though she wants to be as helpful as possible, a teacher does well to look upon the parents'

problems as theirs to carry and theirs to solve. Encouragement, friendliness, willing listening, and constructive comment when comment is called for may go much farther in helping toward the solution of the difficulty than any amount of pity and commiseration.

Sympathetic understanding does not necessarily presuppose trouble or difficulties or unpleasant problems. It may very well mean rejoicing with the parents in their satisfaction about the youngster's progress, or being glad with them over plans for the child that are coming to fruition, or joining with them in enjoyment of this or that which has happened in the family. This does not mean that one should sentimentally take on the enjoyment any more than one should take on the problems; it is just a wholesome, natural seeing how they feel and accepting and respecting them just as they are.

Now and then a teacher finds it easier to be sympathetically understanding when problems loom up than when there is enjoyment and satisfaction and perhaps some actual thrills. There sometimes is a little unexpected jealousy to be disposed of. If it is not jealousy or envy that makes a teacher uninterested in hearing of the parents' enjoyments, it may be the feeling that time might better be spent on the clearing up of difficulties. When a teacher can keep in mind that it takes the ups as well as the downs to make up the whole of family living, it will seem reasonable to listen understandingly to both.

It is sympathetic understanding that helps a teacher to look through the things that might be questioned in the way the parents are bringing up a child to the intent behind the acts—the attempt to do what is best for the youngster. Often in an interview, a teacher who looks through acts to feelings will find some surprising things. Behind the parents' own critical comment about the child often lies the longing to hear the teacher say something favorable and the fear that it will not be said. Many times an air of blasé nonchalance in reply to the teacher's questions or comments covers embarrassment about the child's behavior. Often a shy timidity and depreciation of the child's

accomplishments is a camouflage for great pride in the youngster and a fear of being thought boastful. Sometimes the parent who is most boastful of the success of the methods used in bringing up the child is the one who is most fearful that those methods may fall short of the goal he has set as success. This does not mean that the parents' behavior never reveals their true feelings, and that one must always go searching for something that is different from what it seems to be. It only means that the feelings are the important thing, and that it is necessary to try to understand what they are, and to be willing to let them be that way.

When parents are critical and angry and upset, sympathetic understanding helps a teacher to come out of the interview without hurt feelings or wounded pride and without having taken whatever was said personally. Usually it was not intended as a personal attack, and if it was, it seems best to let it roll off. If one understands that when parents get so upset it is because they care so much, it helps in making it easier to take whatever happens in stride, without resentment and without holding a grudge.

10. Be ready to speak honest admiration for what parents do.

Many teachers have been surprised to find how parents have welcomed a few words of admiration and to see what a lift it has given them to hear that the teacher thinks they are doing a good job with their youngster. It is easy to understand why it should be so. They live with the job twenty-four hours a day and there are sure to be times when they wonder whether washing before eating will ever become voluntary, whether table manners will ever become natural, and whether "in a minute" will ever change to doing things promptly. Then along comes the teacher who sees the child from another angle; sees him away from the parents, trying out some of the learnings the parents had despaired of. Mention that their bringing-up is showing results is welcome news. Often a teacher *thinks* the admiration but never gets around to speaking it. This may be because there never seems to be time for all that waits to be said. However, it does not take

long to say that the parents' teaching shows in the thoughtful things the child does, or that all the discussion of current affairs at home is a great help in social science class, or that the parents' interest in reading shows in the child's familiarity with good books, or that the opportunities the child has had to learn good social usage are evident in his poise and social ease. These are sure to be words that parents will appreciate hearing when they are honestly spoken. A teacher need not fear that it will be considered flattery or the currying of favor. It is easy enough to tell when the words are either of these. It is just as easy to tell when they come out of genuine admiration.

With those parents who are not so successful, a teacher may come to discern feelings of failure which suggest that they need some bit of encouragement more than the others, even though the need may be covered with a don't care manner. Perhaps with the feeling of failure is an added feeling of guilt that they have not done better, or disappointment and bafflement, or dread of the teacher's adverse comment. The speaking of a word of admiration or approval is usually only a matter of remembering to do it, and once one starts it comes easy.

11. Let parents have plenty of opportunity to talk about what concerns them.

It must be very exasperating to a parent to come to an interview with all sorts of things about his child in mind and then never have a chance to tell them. They may be little interesting things that have happened in the family; or things the child has said about school, or perhaps plans that are in the offing; things that one would never know to ask about. When a teacher picks up the conversational ball and never relinquishes it, there is little opportunity to learn of these things.

A teacher may feel that there should be no pauses in the interview, no silent spots, no lag between one topic and another; yet it is often in those quiet moments that a parent will feel free to speak of what is in his thought. A manner of relaxed ease and

lack of any hurry invites such speaking. Often a teacher can gain more understanding of both child and parent in these moments than in the carefully planned ones.

Such was the case when eleven-year-old George's father told of taking him on a hunting trip. The lad shot a squirrel at such a distance as to make the father very proud. On arriving home George said nothing about it to his mother until prodded by his father and then with the comment, "Aw shucks, when you go hunting you expect to get something." As the father told the story, he added the comment that George had never exaggerated about anything he did until one day when he got into trouble with a neighbor, and then, "He told a whopper to get out of it." When the father asked him why he told it, George said, "Because I didn't want to get heck and I knew I would." The father said, "I privately thought that the kid showed good sense, but I had to tell him he'd get double heck after that; once for the doing and once for the big story about it." And then he added that he was glad the boy did not brag, and that he meant to see to it that he didn't, because no one liked a bragger. As for the "big-storying" to get out of trouble, the father said he had an awful time about that himself as a kid and it got him into more trouble than it kept him out of. All of which a teacher would never have known had there not been plenty of chance for the parent to talk.

Nor would fifteen-year-old Doris' teacher have known that the whole family was saving for the girl's graduation dress, even to the six-year-old who brought in pennies earned by selling flowers. And only with the mother's telling would the teacher have known of the effort that went into getting thirteen-year-old Lois the nylon dress that is her pride and joy. Lois is the middle in a family of five and money is scarce. The father is a day laborer and most of what he earns goes for food, so Lois had never had a new dress all her own; only made over ones. The mother said, "I sometimes think in the years to come she might look back on that and feel badly, so we managed the dress and it will be a surprise." The teacher listened and rejoiced with

her in the surprise-to-be, not once saying that maybe the girl would have liked to pick out her own dress.

This is just another way of saying that when a teacher realizes that parents have much to tell and does them the honor of listening, there will come new and deeper understanding.

12. Be ready and willing to explain.

It must give parents a very comfortable feeling to know that their child's teacher is willing to tell them what goes on and to explain why things are as they are. It would certainly seem that no one has a better right to know. Perhaps they wonder how one can be sure that fundamentals of arithmetic are going to be learned, or why printing is taught in the lower grades instead of writing, or why the children are allowed to move around the room instead of staying at their seats, or whether the departmentalized grade that Jennie has just gone into is a good idea. It takes time to explain such things as these, especially when one wants to get at the parents' ideas about them and to find out what the youngster had said at home about them. It takes respect for the parents' feelings to be willing to listen to their comments, especially when one does not agree with their point of view.

A teacher may need to be watchful not to become defensive while explaining, not to be impatient because the parents do not take it for granted that the school knows what it is doing without raising any question about it, and not to feel that because they are questioning they are complaining. Perhaps they *are* complaining, and when there are complaints in thought one does well to find out what they are and to give them respectful consideration. There may be something that merits attention. In any event, the very fact that parents have brought them up suggests that here is something to be thought about.

Sometimes a teacher is irked at being asked to explain something because she is not really able to do so. Maybe the reasons for the doing have not been thought out with enough clarity to be on tap to give to the parents in any convincing sort of way.

It is very handy to be prepared to say, "Because of this we do that," or, "We think it is best to do thus and so because ——." The reasons may lie in facts about the development of children, in what the teacher knows about how learning takes place, or in some of the principles of mental hygiene. If she is ready with reasons, it gives parents confidence. If she is not, they are likely to appreciate being asked to come back again for more explanation. Meanwhile, a talk with the administrator might help to get reasons in order, or maybe what is needed is some reviewing of basic facts about children and a little refreshing of memory about principles of learning. The point is that the teacher's readiness and willingness to talk about the school doings and to explain why they are as they are goes a long way in giving the parents trust and confidence.

13. Let it be seen that the parents are not expected to do all of the adjusting.

Maybe it is a hangover of the old idea that the teacher's word is final that makes parents so often feel that they are the ones who must do all the adjusting and that if there are any changes to be made it must be done at home. As the interview goes on, the teacher's very manner in talking things over, in listening to suggestions, and in being ready to consider how things might be worked out tells more plainly than words that the matter of making adjustments is no one-sided affair and that the teacher is ready to do some of it, too, if need be.

Bringing up some situation and asking how the parents feel it is working out lets it be known that the subject is open to thinking over together. Again, when the parent comes in all hot and bothered over something that has upset the child, the teacher's, "Perhaps I didn't do the best thing about that," speaks clearly the willingness to change if change will help the matter. Maybe it is a matter of thinking with the parent about why the nursery-school or kindergarten child is so tired and irritable when he gets home and coming to the conclusion that more rest

at school and more time there for play alone would help. Perhaps it is a matter of arranging so that the high school student's homework can be done at school, because there is little quiet for it in the trailer where the family of four have to live. Maybe it is arranging for some change in class requirement, as happened with a girl in a science class who was horrified at having to kill insects for mounting because she had been taught, as a part of the family's religious belief, never to kill. The teacher was understanding and the girl thereafter brought in live specimens for the group.

Parents soon know whether the teacher is open to suggestions and whether they can safely ask that some change be made. Sometimes the change cannot be made, but the very fact that the teacher is always ready to consider any possibility usually means that parents will be entirely reasonable when things have to stand as they are, especially if whys and wherefores are given.

14. Summary.

The suggested do's and don't's of teacher-parent interviewing are summarized here in a list for quick and easy reference. Those that have been discussed in detail are included, others are added that have been mentioned only in passing throughout the book, and some are here that may only have been implied. It is not a complete list. No list ever could be. It is only to suggest some ways of doing that express thoughtfulness and consideration and respect as one talks with parents.

Be truthful and honest. Parents appreciate a teacher who can be depended upon to tell things as they are, the pleasant and the unpleasant; a teacher whose word is reliable, and who never tries to put anything over on them.

Respect parents' confidence. When parents speak of their own private affairs, when they tell of their innermost thoughts and feelings, they are showing a trust and confidence in the teacher that suggests great watchfulness that it never be betrayed.

Don't be shocked at whatever is said. This is part of accepting

the fact that there are all sorts of ways of living and doing and thinking and feeling, and of taking whatever is revealed with no blame or condemnation for the parent.

Don't jump to conclusions. A teacher's first guess about how parents feel, what they are going to say, or why they did what they did may be right; but it may not, too. Better wait and listen instead of being too sure.

Take what the parents say seriously. This is a mark of respect. It is an expression, too, of one's recognition that, whatever it is, it has importance because they wanted to say it. Things are not to be taken lightly or facetiously, or brushed off as of no moment.

Don't be authoritative. A teacher who genuinely feels that parents are perfectly able to do their own thinking and their own deciding about what it is best to do is not likely to get very bossy, especially when there is the feeling, too, that there can never be just one right way of doing.

Avoid getting into arguments. If a teacher accepts the parents' right to think as they want to think, to feel as they do feel, and to do as they see it best to do, there is little occasion for argument. One can still present ideas and points of view that may differ. It will then be a matter of suggesting ideas for what they are worth; not for the purpose of convincing the parents that the teacher is right and they are wrong.

Avoid teacherish language. When talking with parents as friend-to-friend, there is no reason to talk any way but naturally and in the words that express one's meaning clearly and simply. Teacherish language often gives the impression of throwing one's weight around, of trying to show off, even though that probably was not intended.

Be sympathetically understanding but not sentimental. Sympathetic understanding will carry with it the acceptance of the way the parents are thinking and feeling and doing as the best way for them without trying to take on their problems for them or assuming any maternalistic (or paternalistic) attitude toward them.

at school and more time there for play alone would help. Perhaps it is a matter of arranging so that the high school student's homework can be done at school, because there is little quiet for it in the trailer where the family of four have to live. Maybe it is arranging for some change in class requirement, as happened with a girl in a science class who was horrified at having to kill insects for mounting because she had been taught, as a part of the family's religious belief, never to kill. The teacher was understanding and the girl thereafter brought in live specimens for the group.

Parents soon know whether the teacher is open to suggestions and whether they can safely ask that some change be made. Sometimes the change cannot be made, but the very fact that the teacher is always ready to consider any possibility usually means that parents will be entirely reasonable when things have to stand as they are, especially if whys and wherefores are given.

14. Summary.

The suggested do's and don't's of teacher-parent interviewing are summarized here in a list for quick and easy reference. Those that have been discussed in detail are included, others are added that have been mentioned only in passing throughout the book, and some are here that may only have been implied. It is not a complete list. No list ever could be. It is only to suggest some ways of doing that express thoughtfulness and consideration and respect as one talks with parents.

Be truthful and honest. Parents appreciate a teacher who can be depended upon to tell things as they are, the pleasant and the unpleasant; a teacher whose word is reliable, and who never tries to put anything over on them.

Respect parents' confidence. When parents speak of their own private affairs, when they tell of their innermost thoughts and feelings, they are showing a trust and confidence in the teacher that suggests great watchfulness that it never be betrayed.

Don't be shocked at whatever is said. This is part of accepting

the fact that there are all sorts of ways of living and doing and thinking and feeling, and of taking whatever is revealed with no blame or condemnation for the parent.

Don't jump to conclusions. A teacher's first guess about how parents feel, what they are going to say, or why they did what they did may be right; but it may not, too. Better wait and listen instead of being too sure.

Take what the parents say seriously. This is a mark of respect. It is an expression, too, of one's recognition that, whatever it is, it has importance because they wanted to say it. Things are not to be taken lightly or facetiously, or brushed off as of no moment.

Don't be authoritative. A teacher who genuinely feels that parents are perfectly able to do their own thinking and their own deciding about what it is best to do is not likely to get very bossy, especially when there is the feeling, too, that there can never be just one right way of doing.

Avoid getting into arguments. If a teacher accepts the parents' right to think as they want to think, to feel as they do feel, and to do as they see it best to do, there is little occasion for argument. One can still present ideas and points of view that may differ. It will then be a matter of suggesting ideas for what they are worth; not for the purpose of convincing the parents that the teacher is right and they are wrong.

Avoid teacherish language. When talking with parents as friend-to-friend, there is no reason to talk any way but naturally and in the words that express one's meaning clearly and simply. Teacherish language often gives the impression of throwing one's weight around, of trying to show off, even though that probably was not intended.

Be sympathetically understanding but not sentimental. Sympathetic understanding will carry with it the acceptance of the way the parents are thinking and feeling and doing as the best way for them without trying to take on their problems for them or assuming any maternalistic (or paternalistic) attitude toward them.

Be ready to speak honest admiration for what the parents do. Parents can usually use plenty of encouragement. Often a teacher feels admiration for things they do, but in the hurry it does not get said. It is thoughtful to mention it because most parents have many moments of doubt and discouragement in bringing up their youngsters. A word from the teacher can be a big lift.

Show genuine interest in what the parents have to say. If one feels it, it is easy to show it. There will be no fidgeting then with things on the desk, and no sitting on the edge of the chair impatiently waiting to get one's own say-so in. The things that the parents speak of may be the very clue that the teacher needs for better understanding the youngster. Often they are more important to talk about than what the teacher has in mind.

Be ready to explain what is done at school and why it is done. This is a matter of courtesy, but it is more than that. It is recognition of the parents' right to know what goes on at school. In a way it is an expression of the teacher's willingness to have the parents' comments about what is done. It suggests respect for their opinion about it all. It is the evidence to the parents that what is done is done with a reason.

Let the parents see that the teacher is willing to make adjustments too. Parents can tell very quickly when the teacher is ready to meet them half way and when there is willingness to listen to and consider their suggestions. There will be no hint of a know-it-all attitude and no suggestion that if anything is amiss it must be at home.

Be watchful not to blame or condemn. A teacher who does not feel like a judge pronouncing sentence will not act like one. The more she genuinely feels that the things that the parents do are right for them as they see it, and that they can only do as they see, the less she will feel either blame or condemnation. When a teacher can come to the point of accepting parents with neither blame nor condemnation, the talking together can go on with little antagonism or resentment.

Don't belittle what the parents do. It is so easy to give them the feeling that it was too little too late, or that it was nice as far

as it went but it did not go far enough, or that it did not amount to much anyway. "I'm sure you did the best you could" can leave a parent feeling very inadequate. "Very nice, but ——" suggests that it was a poor beginning. "Isn't that lovely," in response to whatever the parent speaks of doing, is almost as bad because it is so devoid of specific meaning. A noncommittal, "Um, huh" can give a parent the feeling of being looked down upon from some great height. Often it would surprise a teacher to know how many doubts the parent has and how discouraging a word or manner of belittlement can be.

Don't be superior about the child's better adjustment at school than home. Even though it may be true, such comment as, "Oh, we never have any trouble like that here," usually serves to get teacher and parent at once into a superior-inferior position, even though the teacher probably had no intention of doing so. It often happens that the thing which is a problem at home is no particular problem at school because of the different relationship there, because the whole set-up is different, or because of the different way of meeting it. It is likely to be more helpful to talk over those differences than to launch into an account of the effective way the matter is being handled at school and to imply that the parent is not doing so well.

Don't make parents feel stupid. "Oh, I never would have done such a thing as that," or, "Whatever would make you think of doing *that*?" spoken in a shocked, disapproving tone can make a parent feel that it was a pretty stupid thing to have done. No one likes to feel stupid, so that parent is likely to be cautious when he speaks thereafter. "Well, of course, if that is the way you feel about it," can carry the implication that it is a stupid way to feel. "Oh, you didn't know that we don't teach that way any more?" carries the same implication. This does not mean that giving information about the newer methods in education, about facts of child development that might be helpful, or about principles of mental hygiene will make parents feel ignorant. If the teacher does not feel that parents are stupid, there is little danger of acting so. Then she will give information, comments, sug-

gestions, or whatever, with no implication that the parents lack intelligence or understanding.

In giving suggestions offer more than one possibility. This leaves the decision where it belongs—with the parents. "You might try this or that or this," gives some help but suggests that the parents are entirely able to think it over and decide what will work best for them. "Here are some ways that others have done about that," implies that these parents too can handle the situation successfully and that they are the ones to decide on the way best for them. When a teacher is thoroughly convinced that there is no one right and only way, there will be no temptation to give just one suggestion as the way to do.

Give any suggestions so that parents will be comfortable about taking or leaving them. When a teacher thinks of suggestions as something parents can take or leave, there will be no hurt feelings if they leave them and no blame because they do not use them. The parents will quickly catch the feeling that they are under no obligation to accept them just because they are given and in no danger of being watched to see whether they do or not.

Respect the parents' reserve. This suggests dropping a subject when it is obvious that the parents do not want to discuss it. It may be something that seems very important to the teacher, perhaps something that seems likely to be at the bottom of some difficulty the child is having. It may be something that the teacher feels should be got out in the open or something that there has long been a wonder about. Even so, parents will appreciate the respect for their reserve that prevents either prodding or prying. There may very well be matters of family living that would be enlightening but which it is the parents' right to withhold from conversation if they so wish.

Don't ask personal questions. This is related to the prying spoken of above. Parents may speak voluntarily of personal things, often of very personal ones; but that is quite different from being asked a direct, personal question that will put them on the spot. For all the teacher knows the question asked may touch on some very sore subject or may lead into matters they

would rather not speak of and that the teacher better leave alone. Of course, in talking about the child one does come near to personal matters, but questions or comments about them can be so generally worded that the parents will feel free to speak of what they wish. Thus, "Jimmy seems worried about something all of the time at school; perhaps you would know what might be causing it" could very well bring a quiet, "Yes, I know," without further explanation, if the parent wished, or it could bring details of some family difficulty or a bare statement that no cause for worry was known. At any rate, there would be no reason to feel that the teacher had gone too far into personal matters.

Don't chide the parents. It is not for the teacher to chide or rebuke. To do so is to sit in judgment; to decide what was right or wrong. Further, it is to assume a relationship more like that of parent to child than of two people talking together for a common purpose. It is to question the parents' right to decide their own course of action; almost to hold them accountable for what is done and to prevent its being done again. This is not a teacher's function.

Don't labor a point. Better to touch a point lightly and leave it than to wear it out with much talk. Too much talk seems to suggest that maybe the parents can't quite take it in, or that the teacher is overanxious that they should. Often something that sounds like a good idea in the beginning sounds progressively unattractive the more it is discussed.

Listen. Listening can be active and dynamic and vital. The very willingness to do it comes out of a feeling that the parents have much to give. It indicates a belief that there is something to be learned from them and a readiness to learn. It speaks, more loudly than words, of an interest in what they have to say. It tells of the teacher's respect for them.

Accept. This perhaps is the key to all else: the accepting of the parents as they are, the accepting of oneself, the accepting of the children, the accepting of the situation. This does not mean a blind, resigned, long-suffering acceptance, but an acceptance that sees things as they are, without blame for their being that way

and without recriminations because they are so; that sees them as the only starting point there can be.

All the *do's* and *don't's* of teacher-parent interviewing that might be mentioned are nothing more than the things that will occur to one to do or not to do when one really wants to be friendly and courteous and kindly and considerate. They are ways of doing that come naturally when one feels a genuine respect for parents and confidence in their intent to do the right thing by their children; when one really wants to be friends with them.

14. The question of keeping records

LET US SUPPOSE THAT THE TEACHER HAS BEEN doing a great deal of thinking and planning about interviews in general and about the interviews with parents of this year's group of children in particular. Rodney's mother and dad have come for their first interview of the year and there has been an hour of getting acquainted, of hearing and talking about Rodney at home and at school, of talking together about the things going on at school and the way things are done and some of the school plans ahead, and of taking a look around the building, since Rodney has come from another school and the building is new to the parents. The parents have mentioned the previous school experience and have commented that Rodney liked school from the day he first started in kindergarten. They have spoken of some of their ambitions for the boy, and have mentioned a few things that have bothered them in his bringing up, though, for the most part, it has been pretty free from worry and enjoyable. Then, as the time to go has come, the teacher has walked down the hall to the outside door with the parents, the goodbyes have been said, and they have been invited to come again.

What now, if anything, shall the teacher do about getting a record of the interview on paper? And if it is to be put down in whole or in part, how shall it be done? And, if it is put down, how shall it be used, because unless it is used why put it down? The last question then becomes the first to think of as a teacher comes to this part of the planning and doing. It will always be the first to think of, whether she is just beginning to have interviews or is an old hand at it. It will be the first question to answer, whether the interview is the initial one of the year or the last or the middle. It will be the first thing to consider, whether this interview is the first with these parents or whether there have been many with them. Whatever the situation may be, the first step in deciding what to do about recording is to think about the following question.

A. What Use Is to Be Made of Records?

The answer to that question would seem to give a clue to what to record. Of course, there could never be any one answer. One school will want one thing, another school will want something else. One teacher will want one thing, another something else.

Some may see it as a good idea to jot down enough of what was said to leave no doubt, as interviews go on with many parents, about who said what. When there are many children in the group, it is easy enough to get some of the things that Linda's parents said mixed up with those spoken of by Lola's. At the time of the saying it may seem impossible to forget who said them. One does, though, and making some sort of record helps in keeping what was said sorted out.

Perhaps the record of one interview will be wanted as a reminder, so that when the next one comes up with the same parents no precious time will be wasted in fumbling around trying to recall what the last conversation covered or where it left off. If notations have been made of important items of information given by the parents, a teacher will be saved the embarrassment

of having completely forgotten something that they might very well have expected her to remember. Not that any irreparable damage will be done if a teacher does forget now and then, but it does show interest and alertness to have facts straight and on tap when parents come.

It may be that the administrator wants to keep informed about all of the contacts with parents and so asks for some sort of a record of each interview. He may see it as one way of keeping in touch with all that goes on, or as a way of gaining more understanding of the different youngsters than he could otherwise. He may want it kept as part of the child's record, so that the picture will be as fully rounded as possible.

The main use to be made of any record of the teacher-parent interview would seem to be in the teacher's work with the youngster, since the purpose in having the interview in the first place is to help toward a better understanding of him and of how to work with him. This suggests that whatever will best help the teacher in the daily school living with the youngster would be the thing to record. That ties in with keeping the matters that come up in the various interviews sorted out, with keeping one interview related to the next, and with keeping the administrator informed.

Any recording of what goes on in the interview is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is useful in the measure that it serves the purpose of having the interview in the first place. This means that only general suggestions can be given here, either about what it may be useful to record or about forms for recording, because both of these things are something to be worked out individually to fit the needs of a given situation. The records might even be so informal that there would not be any forms. One might want only a general form anyway, since what might be recorded from one interview could very well be different from what is recorded of another. Deciding on the use to be made of records, the kinds of things to be in them, and the way to put it down, would seem to be a matter for teacher and administrator to work out together. Certainly it could be a very

fruitful topic for staff discussion, since it goes into the purpose of the interview in the first place, into what is of significance in it, and into the use to be made of the things that come up.

Thinking of records as a means to an end, to be worked out individually, both in content and in form, in light of the use to be made of them, suggests that they are likely to stay in a pretty fluid, flexible state. One may come to the conclusion that it is something that cannot be decided once and for all, because it would always depend on the use to be made of them, and that would change as the teacher and administrator come to new understandings and envision new possibilities.

B. What Shall Be Recorded?

This can only be suggestive, because not only will no two teachers want to record the same things, but any one teacher is very likely to put down quite different things after the interview with Stephen's parents than after the one with Roland's or Elsie's or Suzanne's. The record is likely to change, too, as the year goes on. What seems important in the things that the parents say about Jeanne this month may not be so important two months from now, and something else may have taken its place. It is a matter of continuing change to meet the need of the moment. No matter what type of thing one may have decided to record, the first step in picking out the specific things to write down would be to think over what was said and how it was said.

1. Considering what happened.

Of course, a teacher does not wait until an interview is over to think about what happened. It goes on as a running line of thought during the interview, perhaps thus: "That explains why he has so much to say about current affairs; they talk a lot at home. Wonder if his father would come in to talk to the group. Must remember to ask him to tell about that trip. Wonder why Mother has a chip on her shoulder. Wonder what she disapproves

of here. Wish she would speak up. Maybe I better ask Mother to come in alone sometime. Finances seem to bother her. I must see about his lunch. Maybe he is hungry when he comes. Wonder why he doesn't eat breakfast. Guess I better not ask about homework yet. This is no time to suggest more help at home. Mother seems defensive. Wonder why."

Then the parents are gone and the teacher thinks back over it all, sizing it all up, picking out this thing and that as important, putting a finger on something here to be sure to remember, thinking of something that was said that explains the youngster's puzzling behavior, wondering what was meant by that comment, thinking over how the parents seem to feel, remembering a suggestion that struck her as sensible to try out, thinking about comments that were made about the youngster, thinking of her impressions of the parents themselves and their feelings about the youngster, remembering certain items of information.

In thinking over all that went on during an interview, a teacher is pretty likely right then to put a finger on the things that are of particular significance at the moment, the things that suggest what it may be useful to record. It is likely that a good many more things will stand out in thought than can be recorded, and that, out of all those that seem especially important, she will have to make the selection of whatever will be most useful.

2. Some things one may want to write down.

One may want to make brief note of the main matters discussed. This can come in handy for reference before the next interview, as a quick résumé for the administrator, or as a means of getting what was talked about clearly in mind. Sometimes it is helpful to check such a list against notes of things one wanted to bring up that were jotted down before the parents came.

It may be useful to have in writing any general information that may have been given by the parents. It is so easy to forget such items. Perhaps Grandmother is coming soon to live with the family. Maybe Dad has lost his job or is moving to another

with an increase in salary. Perhaps the dog that Jim has so longed for is to be his birthday gift. It may be that everyone is pleased about a new baby coming, or they may not be so keen about it. Or there may be plans to buy a new home where the child will have his own room. Or maybe the child's room is about to be refurnished according to the youngster's tastes. Maybe the mother is about to take a job, or to leave the job she has for another, or to stop working.

There may be information that one will want to keep about the parents themselves, about family doings, or about the child. There may be mention of the parents' hobby, of some previous occupation, of childhood experiences, or of some satisfied or unsatisfied hope or ambition. Something may be said about things the family enjoys doing together, about the attitude toward religion, or about one thing and another that tells of the family living pattern. Any information about the child, of course, is of direct interest and often will be something of considerable significance. It may go back to babyhood or the early years, or it may have to do with previous school experiences, summer camp, or what not.

The parents may make some suggestion that the teacher will want to be sure to keep about the best way to work with the youngster. It may be equally important to record suggestions that the teacher made. She may want to make note of ideas that occurred to her as the discussion went on, even though nothing may have been said about them. Often some comment brings the passing thought that this or that might be a good thing to do, and unless it is written down pretty soon after the interview, it is forgotten. It always seems too bad for a good idea to get lost because it is not put down.

Since feelings are all-important, the teacher may want to make some note of the kind that seemed to be around during the interview. The parents may have been very appreciative of the opportunity for the talk together and may have spoken their appreciation. Or they may have been very reserved, with little to say, and apparently with something of a chip on their shoul-

ders. They may have seemed to be something less than quite straightforward, or in a hurry to get through and be gone, or ready to stay indefinitely and to talk freely about anything pertaining to child or family. A teacher may want to put such things as these down as impressions rather than facts. It could well be that there will be impressions that she will *not* want to put into writing, but only to make mental note of them. Among these could be impressions of the relationships with the child, the relationships within the family, the attitude toward life in general, or the feeling about the school.

Then there are all the little notations to oneself of things to be sure to do, things it is a good idea to get right down into writing before they slip out of thought. Maybe there will be things such as these: Look up title and publisher of book mentioned to Johnny's mother. Get name of magazine suggested for Susie. Tell superintendent how pleased Nina's parents were about the interview they had with him. Tell music specialist that parents spoke of their appreciation of the special help given Ethel. Have Tom tell about the trip the family is planning. And so on and on. The teacher may want to put down any suggestions that occur at the moment for a future interview: maybe something she did not get to this time; maybe a note to be sure to set the next one for a time when the father can come, too; maybe comment that the administrator might like to come in on the next one because of some particular interest of the parents.

There will be all sorts of things that will be recorded in the teacher's thoughts but that will never get onto paper. Probably some of them will be the most important things about the interview; the teacher's feelings about what happened. They might be such things as: How wonderful to have parents who are so interested. My, how confused they are. I wonder if they get much fun out of Jerry. No wonder he is as he is. I should not have spoken up so quickly about that; they didn't like it and I don't blame them. We didn't get far but it broke the ice and maybe they will come another time. They don't seem to think much of the school, but I am glad they spoke freely. School

seems to be about the only hope for that child. Jennie will come through her difficulty with parents like that. Those are people I'll enjoy knowing and having for friends. Thoughts such as these are important outcomes of an interview, but they are things that are hard to write down, and probably it is just as well that they do not become a matter of record.

When one is deciding what to record, the question always comes up of what to do about very intimate, personal information that is helpful to know and of great significance in understanding a child, but that one would not want to have seen and, therefore, would hesitate to put into writing. The decision on what shall go into records is one for teacher and administrator to make, but it does seem that one can hardly be too careful about fastening anything to either child or parent that might in any way make living harder for them.

C. How Shall Recording Be Done?

This goes back to the use for which the records are intended and to what is going to be in them. This suggests that only the people who are to use them can really say how to make them. What is handy for one may be very unhandy for another. The suggestions offered here are of things to think about in deciding what to do.

1. Decide on a system for keeping records in order.

The fact that the records are to be used suggests the wisdom of some sort of system that makes them easy to locate. For some this would be a file drawer with folders, for others a card file. It is important to watch that the system does not get in the way. It can easily do so if it is too elaborate. It usually seems better to begin with something very simple and let it grow. Probably the simplest thing one could think of would be a drawer with a folder for each child or a file box with a guide card for each child where the notes about the interview with the parents could be

kept, either along with any other records about the child or separately, as the teacher prefers. Whatever is most convenient seems the thing to do, just so the record does not get filed and never looked at again. Whether folder or card file is used, it is handy to have the child's name in letters big enough and in ink heavy enough to be seen easily. When a teacher has to squint around to find the desired folder or card, it tends to discourage using it. If a card file is chosen, it is better to choose one that is of a size which is individually convenient, whether taking 3 x 5 cards or one of the larger sizes. It will depend to some extent on how much one is going to write. A great accumulation of small cards can become a nuisance to handle and keep in usable order.

2. About the form to use.

An elaborate form often gets in the way of what one wants to write. When it is necessary to go searching through headings and subheadings to find the place to put some item, then the form is hindering instead of helping the record. Usually it is a good idea to begin with a very few headings, then to subdivide when there are too many notes under those to use them easily. A teacher might want to start off with only such headings as: 1. Main points covered. 2. Suggestions and comments to keep in mind. 3. General impressions and teacher's comments. It would then be necessary to decide where to put items of general information, whether under main points discussed or under suggestions to remember. Or it might be decided to have a fourth heading. Some might not want to have any headings at all to begin with, preferring rather to take notes on a few interviews first, then go over them to see how they group themselves and make headings accordingly.

The form is only a means to the end of keeping notes in such order that they can be referred to easily. When it is looked at that way, any discussions of the form to use will begin with what it seems important to have written down and will go on from there to decide what form will make this easiest and simplest. Forms worked out this way will change frequently. Any time

notes under one heading begin to pile up so that it is hard to find what is wanted, chances are another heading is needed. Or if little or nothing has been put under some heading, then it is time to drop that one. Or if there are things that need to be put down but no place to put them, it is time to provide the place.

If a form is to be used, the teacher may want it set up so that notes from each interview are on a different sheet. Or she may want it on a cumulative basis, with space under each heading for notes on each interview to be added as it occurs. Some teachers may use a diary type of record, showing in consecutive order what happened during the interview. Others may prefer a description of the parts of the interview that seem most important. Or it may be that a summary will best serve the purpose. Usually the simple two-, three-, or four-heading type are easiest to keep and to use.

Identification of the record should be considered. It seems best that each record be identified in some way. It is easy for a record to get out of place in the files or to get left on the desk and, unless it is identified, it may be difficult to find where it belongs. The child's name is the simplest identification. Some teachers may want the parents' name and address included on each record, though this means more writing. It is easier to have this information on the outside of the folder or the guide card that carries the child's name than to repeat it on each sheet of notes. It is possible to give a key number to each child and to have that number appear on the folder (or guide card) and correspondingly on each set of notes. The administrator may want the teacher's name on the records, or initials may serve the purpose. It is a good idea to get the habit of dating notes, so that one will never need to wonder when the interview took place or whether this set of notes belongs before or after that one.

This all refers to the form for the records that are for the teacher's own use. There may be other forms that the administrator will want filled out, with information in more permanent form than the teacher needs.

3. Writing the records.

The amount to write and the detail in which it is written go back again to the use to be made of the record. Often a brief record, with succinct statements and little detail, is easier to refer to and will serve the purpose better than a long, wordy, detailed one. Short ones are about all a teacher is likely to have time to do, and it can soon become a habit to make every word count. It may not even be necessary to use complete sentences. A phrase or a few cue words often serve the purpose perfectly well. Since these are all records for the teacher's own use, there seems no necessity for them to be exercises in style. If they are to be put into permanent files they would, of course, need to be intelligible to others, and cue words and phrases might not suffice. Here, as in all other details of record-keeping, things go better with a simple start, just beginning with a few notes and adding more as their usefulness becomes more and more apparent. There is no point in writing for the sake of writing, but when it becomes apparent that the writing is a help in getting other things done, then it does have a point.

There is the question, then, of pencil or pen. Sometimes the teacher gets the idea of doing records in pencil, then typing them up later. Usually the plan of having them all nicely typed up soon falls by the wayside for lack of time. It is best to do what can be done easily. Pencilled notes very soon become useless because of rubbing, and any of the available pens make a more usable record. However, that does not rule out pencilled notes when they are easiest to make.

4. When to do the record.

The teacher may not be able to sit down to do the recording of the interview the minute the parent leaves. Indeed, she may not want to do it so soon, preferring to have a little time for

mulling it over in order to decide what to record. Most teachers find it a good idea to jot down some key words and a few brief notes immediately, while all that has been said is fresh in mind. With these for reminders, the interview can be reconstructed in thought and the record written up more at leisure. The sooner it can be done, the less the danger of forgetting what was said or of getting it mixed up with things that have happened in the interim.

The question of taking notes during the interview always comes up. The answer depends on the circumstances. One would not want note-taking to get in the way of free and easy talking together, and some parents feel that, when the teacher is taking notes, attention is divided and they are being only half listened to. Others feel that if what they say is to be written down they must be very cautious. Many would shy away from having personal matters go into the record. The teacher may feel that what is being said is too important to run the risk of forgetting it, but, seeing that the parents are uncomfortable about it, might rather run that risk than to make them uneasy. If it is some factual bit of information that needs to be accurately kept, the teacher's simple comment that she is writing it down so she will be sure to have it right will usually be readily accepted. Or if it is some anecdote about the child that has special interest, the parents are likely to be glad to have it appreciated enough to be written down. They may feel the same way about suggestions they offer; the fact that they are being written down giving assurance that they will be considered. It becomes a matter of deciding each time what is the courteous, considerate, useful thing to do. Indeed, all of recording is a matter of deciding what is best under the circumstances.

D. Then Going On from There

At first thought it might seem that, with the recording done, the final step of the interview has been taken. Not so. The recording, whether it be mental recording or written recording, is

only the step needed to take the interview results right into the schoolroom living, to translate the things that were said and done into practical usefulness, and to point up other definite things that should be done. It may lead to a talk with the principal, to sending home a promised book, to the parents' coming for a visit to the classroom, and, almost surely, to a difference here and there in the teacher's thinking, because of new insight gained from the talk together. Thus, whatever recording one may do becomes a step in carrying forward the purpose and the usefulness of any interview.

It should be kept in mind that all that has been said here about record-keeping has to do only with the teacher's own record of the interview for teaching purposes. It may very well be that the administrator will have certain office forms for keeping interview information in permanent files, perhaps as part of the child's cumulative record. If there are such forms, the teacher will, no doubt, be given the instructions necessary for keeping them. The concern here is wholly with the records that will make the interview of practical use to the teacher the very next day and all the days thereafter. If the records do that, then it would seem that they are useful records. If they do not, then it would seem that some better way of recording could be found, bearing in mind always that it is a *means to an end* and not an end in itself. Looked upon in this way, the recording of an interview will never be a burden. It will be something that the teacher will be glad to do for the same reason that she is glad to have the interview, because it helps her to do a better job of teaching.

Just as the recording of any one interview is only one step toward bringing the results of the interview into practical usefulness, so is the planning for any one interview and the doing of that interview a step on toward the next and the next.

In looking back over the interviews of the day or of the week, it is natural for a teacher to think, "I am glad I did this," or "I wish I had done that," or "I wonder if it would have been better if I had done thus and so." There may be a feeling of satisfaction that there were no interruptions and nothing to hurry the talk-

ing, or that the parents got to have their say on the things about which they were disgruntled, or that the samples of Edith's work were near at hand because her parents seemed to appreciate seeing it. Maybe there will be a mental note to have other children's work out when their parents come, too. There may be regret at having spoken so quickly in defense of one's way of teaching that it shut off the parents' critical comment and thereby lost the chance to know what more they had in mind. Perhaps with the regret will go the resolve to be slower to speak another time.

It may come to mind that Jimmy's very tall father looked most uncomfortable on the low chair he was using, with the mental note to be more alert to having parents seated comfortably. There may be some moments spent in wondering what kept the conversation from being as free and easy as the teacher had hoped it would be, and perhaps the conclusion that suggestions were too numerous or were offered before the parents were ready for them. There may be the realization that the time was too short, or that another time might have been more convenient for the parents, or that it would have been much better to have gone to the home. Maybe the teacher did go to the home and there is a feeling of satisfaction at having made the effort and of appreciation for the parents' hearty welcome and warm friendliness.

All of this thinking about the details of each interview is both an appraisal of what has been done and a planning ahead for what will be done. Thus, the planning and the doing are so closely interrelated that one can scarcely be thought of without the other. As a teacher considers how all of the ahead-of-time planning, both general and specific, worked out, it can become a help in knowing better what to do and what not to do the next time. It is thus a step in learning to do the kind of interviewing of which parents, when they speak of it, will say, "It was good to have talked together."

In conclusion

SHOWING CLEARLY THROUGH ALL THAT has been written in this book the reader will see evidence of some of the things in which we deeply believe. Some of these have been spoken of many times. Some may not have been mentioned in so many words, although clearly implied. Mentioned or unmentioned, stated or only implied, they are in the book, feelings underlying and coloring all that we have said and determining its emphasis. These feelings, indeed, have been the deciding factor in what we would say.

One of these feelings, which is basic and fundamental, is our deep respect for parents. It is not only our feeling, but our considered conviction, that the great majority of parents have the best good of their children as they see it at heart, and that whatever they do is with the intent to do the best they can for them. Over and over again we have implied, even though we may not have said it outright, that a teacher who honestly feels this respect for parents is off to a good start for building friendly and useful relationships in the interviews with them. It is a start based on trust instead of doubt and suspicion. True enough, one may not agree with the way they see it or with the way they do it.

One may feel that in some instances personal desires get so much in the way that the child's good is temporarily lost to sight. Even so, there still can be, and we believe there usually is, a basic intent to do the right thing by the youngsters. We do not overlook the fact that a teacher will sometimes find parents who are not particularly interested in their children; some, indeed, who even do not like them and who look upon them as a nuisance. Even with these there may be more of interest than the teacher knows, and their number is likely to be relatively small.

Another basic belief which colors all that we have said is that, for the most part, teachers, too, have the best good of the children at heart, and that it is their intent and their sincere desire to do the best they can for them. As we see it that best can be fully achieved only when teacher and parents know each other and talk together about the things that touch upon the child's school living, to the end that it shall be made rich and full and useful; the kind of living that fits him.

This leads directly to another of our basic beliefs, and this one has been often mentioned. It is that the school is for the children, that to fulfill its function it must begin by understanding each of the children as an individual, and that this is the most fundamental reason for teacher and parents to get together and the prime reason for the administrator's wishing to have them do so. We see the function of the school as helping children in their learnings about people and things and the hows of doing, in their discoveries and explorations of the whats and whys and wherefores of the world they are in, and in the unfolding of thoughts and feelings that are wholesome and useful to themselves and others. We think of school as a place where teacher and children live and learn together, not a place where the one does all the teaching and the others all the learning. We see the teacher as the leader, the guide, the one with greater wisdom and insight and wider vision, the one with broader experience and more of the know-how, but, withal, a friend and companion in the daily living together.

Another of our beliefs is indicated by the fact that, throughout

the book, we have said "parents" and not merely "parent." This is because we believe so thoroughly that a youngster's school living benefits when *both* parents are in on it. We think a teacher does well to start right off with the idea that Dad is just as interested as Mother. Usually he is interested and is glad enough to get in on things when he has the chance. We probably have made it clear, too, that we believe in taking the parents as one finds them, with no feelings of necessity to try to make them over or to convince them that they should be some other way than they are. Indeed, one of our very basic beliefs is that an accepting attitude toward parents, children, administrator, and everyone else, including oneself, is a useful point from which to work. We mean by that an acceptance based on a genuine willingness to let people be themselves, an acceptance based upon the understanding that they *can* be only as they are, that they *can* do only as they think and feel. Of course we know that they can change and that they *do* change. So does a teacher. But the change is for each to do himself; a change that comes from inside out. With this accepting attitude, a teacher and parents can talk together in the give-and-take sort of way that we have frequently mentioned. We believe that only when the talking together is an exchange of thoughts and suggestions and comments—a genuine thinking together—can an interview really serve its purpose fully. We have often said and frequently implied that we firmly believe that interviewing should be for all of the parents of all of the children, not merely for those whose youngsters are beset with "problems." We want to give emphasis again to that belief and to set forth our feeling that every child is entitled to the benefit that comes to him when his teacher and parents are working together; that teaching is bettered thereby; that living for everyone concerned is therefore immeasurably enriched.

It may sound, from all that we have said about teacher-parent interviews, as if we think they are the very most important thing a teacher can ever do with parents. We do think they are very important, because of the opportunity they offer for close acquaintanceship, but we certainly do not see them as the only

thing. As a matter of fact, we see them as an integral part of the whole picture of teacher-parent-administrator-specialist contacts. We would like to have them thought of in this larger setting of all the relationships with the parents; as one with all the group meetings, the teacher-parent committee work, the PTA meetings, and whatever else is done with parents. We would like to leave them in their place, as we see it, in the child's whole school living, not merely in any one school year but in all the years. As we think of them they are not set off in separate units by school years that begin in September and end in May. Nor do we see them as beginning in a big way with a child's start to school, only to grow fewer and fewer until, by the end of high school, they have entirely disappeared. We see them rather as a way of working together that begins when the child's school life begins and continues to its end. We see each interview within a year leading on to the next, and those of any one year leading on to those of the year that follows. An interview becomes, then, not an isolated episode, but truly a way of working together; a means to the end of making each child's school living better.

These are some of the basic beliefs out of which this book has been written. They explain why we have said the things we have. We are, each of us, grateful for the many opportunities we have had over the years to work with parents in this way, and we would wish for other teachers the same rich rewards which we ourselves have known.

Some suggested readings

SOME READINGS ARE SUGGESTED HERE BE-
cause a teacher who is having interviews is almost sure to want to turn to books, pamphlets, and magazines for ideas and inspiration and know-how in many different areas.

Few references are included on interviewing as such, because not much has been written about the kind of interviews that we have discussed in this book. A considerable number of references are given on child development and child psychology for the various ages, because this is such a good background for talking with parents. Of course, a teacher will have studied this when preparing for teaching, but most teachers find, as they work with children and talk with parents, that they want to go back again and again to all of the details about the way children grow and develop. We have included some references that take up details of teaching, since in interviewing one is always interpreting the school doings to the parents and discussing the whys and wherefores of what is done. Principally our thought has been to offer references which will give deeper insight into behavior and a broader understanding of people.

There are many books, of course, which a teacher will already

own, others that may be in the school library, and some that the administrator will have and be willing to loan. We have listed only a few here which seem to us to be particularly helpful. For the pamphlets and magazine articles, we decided to give only a few references as typical of those that might be secured from the sources we have mentioned. This seemed to be the best plan to follow, since some teachers will be interested in one type of reference and some in another, and some will have access to different sources than others. The main thing is to come to the interview with a broad background of thinking about children and ways of working with them, about people and relationships with them, and about living in general.

Books

1. Axline, Virginia Mae, *Play Therapy: The Inner Dynamics of Childhood*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947. For the teacher's better understanding of children and of how their behavior grows out of inner feelings.
2. Bingham, Walter Van Dyke and Bruce V. Moore, *How to Interview*, Third revised edition. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941. Besides defining the word interview and setting forth the purposes thereof, techniques are discussed with suggestions on preparing for and carrying on the interview.
3. Breckenridge, Marion E. and E. Lee Vincent, *Child Development*, Second edition. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1949. A detailed account of growth through the school years, with sketches of the growth stages in the years preceding school entrance.
4. Cole, Luella, *Psychology of Adolescence*, Third edition. New York: Rinehart, 1948. A book that gives an understanding of adolescent development and behavior.
5. Erickson, Clifford E., *The Counseling Interview*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950. For the teacher who wants to become familiar with the techniques of the counselling interview.
6. Frank, Mary and Lawrence K., *How To Help Your Child in School*. New York: The Viking Press, 1950. This is written primarily for parents and sets forth with great clarity and understanding the ways in which a child's school and home living can tie together and the importance for the child that it should.

7. Gans, Roma, Celia Stendler, and Millie Almy. *Teaching Young Children*. Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1952. A book for teachers in nursery school, kindergarten, and primary grades, setting forth ways of teaching built on insight and understanding of children. This is a book which, instead of giving the answers, helps teachers to find the answers to fit their own situations.
8. Garrison, Karl G., *The Psychology of Adolescence*, Fourth edition. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951. A book to help in understanding the development during adolescence. Cites basic experimental studies.
9. Gesell, Arnold, and Frances L. Ilg, *Child Development*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949. A treatise dealing with the patterning of behavior and with the developmental sequences in the first ten years, including growth gradients so arranged as to show the continuing course of development. Useful for a teacher who wants factual information on children's development.
10. Gruenberg, Sidonie (Ed.), *Our Children Today*. New York: Viking Press, 1952. A book that parents will enjoy and that will be useful for teachers. Covers many of the things that will come up in interviews.
11. Heffernan, Helen (Ed.), *Guiding the Young Child*. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1951. This book is set up to serve as a guide to growth and development of children in nursery schools, kindergartens, and primary grades, with application to curriculum and home-school relations. Practical, useful, enjoyable.
12. Hamrin, S. A., *Guidance Talks to Teachers*. Bloomington, Illinois: McKnight and McKnight, 1947. The author favors holding an interview with each beginning pupil and gives suggestions for these.
13. Hymes, James L., Jr., *Effective Home-School Relations*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953. Practical help is given here in achieving useful, enjoyable home-school relations. The book makes delightful reading besides offering help on every page.
14. Hymes, James L., Jr., *Understanding Your Child*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952. This is a book which will be useful to teachers in bringing a deeper understanding of children and parents. It is one of these that a teacher can recommend to parents.
15. Jersild, Arthur T., *Child Psychology*, Fourth edition. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954. This book covers all phases of development with emphasis on seeing the child as a social being, as "a

340 SOME SUGGESTED READINGS

person in his own right." Covers the prenatal period to junior adolescence.

16. Langdon, Grace, *Home Guidance for Young Children*, Second edition. New York: The John Day Company, 1947. A handbook for parents of children under six; useful to a teacher in providing content for teacher-parent interviews. A book to recommend to parents.
17. Langdon, Grace and Irving W. Stout, *These Well-Adjusted Children*. New York: The John Day Company, 1951. This book is one which it is believed will help teachers to a deeper understanding of the home living of children and of the child-parent relationships and to broader insight into parents' feelings about the bringing up of their children. It is a book that a teacher may want to recommend to parents.
18. Langdon, Grace and Irving W. Stout, *The Discipline of Well-Adjusted Children*. New York: The John Day Company, 1952. The story of discipline as the parents of a large group of children of varying ages see it. A book to broaden understanding and to deepen insight.
19. Nesbitt, Marion, *A Public School for Tomorrow*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953. The story of everyday doings in a public school where parents are very much a part of the school and teacher-parent interviews are a part of those doings. This is a book which can hardly fail to give one a lift and a vision of what it is possible to do when teachers and parents work together to make school living rich for children.
20. Richey, Robert W., *Planning for Teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952. A practical reference book for teachers who are trying to make school living rich and meaningful for children.
21. Spears, Harold, *Principles of Teaching*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951. A book which beginning teachers (and other teachers as well) will find practically useful, for the author discusses principles of education as they apply to everyday situations.
22. Strang, Ruth, *An Introduction to Child Study*, Third edition. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951. This is a useful handbook for teachers in any grade. Facts of development are set forth and their implications for teaching are discussed in detail, with illustrations that any teacher will recognize as having come out of actual situations.
23. Strang, Ruth, *Counseling Techniques in College and Secondary Schools*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949. Sets forth the

- concept of interviews as a joint quest, with parents having much to contribute. All suggestions stem from this basic point of view.
24. Weber, Julia, *My Country School Diary*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946. It is easy to read and is sure to deepen insight into what school can be. Good for both teachers and parents, and full of things to discuss.

Pamphlets and Magazine References

One of the first steps in writing this book on teacher-parent interviews was an extensive search for all the references having to do with teacher-parent interviewing published in the last fifty years. There was not very much. More and more is appearing in current publications as its importance is coming to be more generally recognized. There has been quite a lot published about interviewing in business, but these references have not been included, though one can get many very useful suggestions from the techniques in current use in personnel interviewing and the like. The following are the references on teacher-parent interviewing as such that seem to us to be useful:

PAMPHLETS

25. D'Evelyn, Katherine, *Individual Parent-Teacher Conferences*. New York: Teachers College, Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1945. A booklet dealing in a practical helpful way with the content and techniques of conferences with parents at school. Some typical conferences are analyzed in detail.
26. *Handbook for Providing Guidance Services*, State of Illinois: Board for Vocational Education, Series A. *Bulletin* #107 (June 1949). Gives steps in interviewing, suggestions for interviewing techniques, and comments on the functions of interviews. A teacher will often find that various departments of the state government put out bulletins, of which the above is typical, which would be helpful in interviewing. It is suggested that one write to the State Departments of Education, Health, Welfare, in one's own state or others, to find what is available.
27. Strang, Ruth, *Reporting to Parents*. Number 10 of Practical Suggestions for Teaching, Hollis Caswell, Editor. New York: Teachers College, Bureau of Publications, Columbia University,

- from them are mentioned. Based on the program of conferences carried on in a New Jersey Public School. This journal often carries such articles along with the ones on teaching in the elementary grades, which make up the bulk of the magazine.
33. Detwiler, O. L., "Parent Conferences," *Instructor*, Vol. LVII, October 1948, 12-13. Describing how an Illinois public school created a wholesome necessity for a parent-teacher conference with every parent near the beginning of the school term. Mentions purposes and results. This is another magazine published for teachers with helpful articles touching the interview.
 34. Eckelberry, R. H., "Wanted—Better Conference Procedures," *Educational Research Bulletin*, No. 30, January 1951, 22-23. Gives suggestions for interview techniques, emphasizing observance of democratic procedure and good leadership.
 35. Hess, E. V., *Journal of the National Education Association*, Vol. 23, Nos. 2 and 3, February and March, 1934, 37-38, 83-84. A series of articles touching on home visits and their results, emphasizing their importance not only in benefit to the child but in the advantages to the school from a public relations point of view. This is the official journal of the National Education Association and it has many articles a teacher who is interviewing should find helpful. An administrator usually takes this magazine and would probably be glad enough to let a teacher read it.
 36. Hufstedler, Virginia, "Parents and Teachers Talk It Over," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. IV, April 1947, 429-432. Written by a guidance director in public school system, showing how some of the barriers between teachers and parents can be overcome by a closer relationship brought about through conferences.
 37. McDanile, Inga Carter, "Establishing Effective Home-School Relationships," *California Journal of Elementary Education*, Vol. XVI, February 1948, 160-175. Discusses the importance of home-school cooperation, with special reference to parent-teacher conferences and emphasis on the conferences reporting school progress. It is suggested that a teacher does well to find out whether there is a state journal such as this where she is teaching, and, if so, to make use of it.
 38. Howse, Gertrude, "Parents Meet Teachers," *Illinois Education*, Vol. 39, No. 6, January 1951, 174, 183, 188. Showing the procedure followed in one school to prepare teachers for a conference with parents.
 39. Martin, Mary Love, "Home Visits," *Journal of Home Economics*, November 1943, 575-576. This gives an account of visits made by vocational homemaking teachers in Alabama to the

344 SOME SUGGESTED READINGS

- homes of their students and the results of these visits. This journal frequently carries articles which a homemaking teacher (and others) would find useful as background for interviews.
40. Oetting, E. R., "Who's Interviewing Whom?" *American School Board Journal*, Vol. 121, No. 4, December 1, 1950, 45, 46, 68. Suggests useful techniques for interviews and emphasizes the importance of having them. Note: This is a journal which the administrator is likely to have and which a teacher might ask to borrow now and then.
 41. Osborne, Ernest G., "Modern Parents Go to School," *The Survey*, Vol. 86, April 1950, 190-193. Points out that, although systematic research in child development and family relations has contributed largely to our insight, the most comprehensive body of knowledge and understanding has grown out of the give and take of parents.
 42. Reynolds, E. J., "If Teachers Really Knew Parents," *School and Community*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, January 1950, 21. Presents the point of view that knowing parents personally causes better understanding and deeper appreciation for the homes of the pupils and suggests the importance of making an effort to get together.
 43. "Did You Attend Parents' Night?" *Better Homes and Gardens*, Child Care and Training Department, October 1948. This article, encouraging both parents to attend PTA meetings and parent-teacher interviews, is cited as illustrating the type of help that can often be secured through the pages of this magazine and others, which are concerned with home living of the whole family and so are concerned with the relationship of home and school. A teacher will also find much helpful background material on topics discussed during interviews.

Teacher-Parent Interviews is a subject in which the National Congress of Parents and Teachers is, of course, vitally interested. The official organ of the organization, *The National Parent-Teacher*, always has articles a teacher will find useful. The address of National Congress of Parents and Teachers is 600 S. Michigan Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois. If the school does not supply the magazine and the various pamphlets the organization publishes, it is suggested that a teacher will find it helpful to secure these individually.

Miscellaneous Pamphlets

Here are some pamphlet references about school doings, both for the teacher's own reading and for parents who are interested in looking into the whys and wherefores:

44. *Adventures in Human Relations*. Association for Childhood Education International, 1200 Fifteenth St. N.W., Washington, D. C., 1948. This is a series of warm, human, understanding accounts of how children and teachers have lived and worked together and how in their living they have touched the lives of other people. This association also publishes the next five pamphlets and many others which it would be worth a teacher's while to find out about. They cover the range from beginning of school through the intermediate grades.
45. *Are These Our Schools?* 1949. This is a collection of accounts and comments by teachers in widely distributed schools, bringing out the conditions that help or handicap children in their school living. There are many points that teacher and parents will often want to talk over together.
46. *The Arts and Children's Living*. 1945. Here is both description and interpretation of the ways in which the arts can become a part of children's everyday school living, not something which is done in some set period and then left until another period to be taken up again.
47. *This Is Arithmetic*. 1945. Here is a pamphlet which shows through description and comment how children's ideas and understandings about all that goes to make up "arithmetic" are all tied in with everyday living.
48. *Children Can Work Independently*. 1952. This pamphlet, together with the teacher's comments during teacher-parent interviews, will give parents a good picture of what independent work periods in the early grades can offer to children.
49. *Helping Children Live and Learn*. 1952. An account of school-room living in all sorts of different situations.
50. Driscoll, Gertrude, *How To Study the Behavior of Children*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University. Gives practical help in knowing how to go about understanding children.

344 SOME SUGGESTED READINGS

- homes of their students and the results of these visits. This journal frequently carries articles which a homemaking teacher (and others) would find useful as background for interviews.
40. Oetting, E. R., "Who's Interviewing Whom?" *American School Board Journal*, Vol. 121, No. 4, December 1, 1950, 45, 46, 68. Suggests useful techniques for interviews and emphasizes the importance of having them. Note: This is a journal which the administrator is likely to have and which a teacher might ask to borrow now and then.
 41. Osborne, Ernest G., "Modern Parents Go to School," *The Survey*, Vol. 86, April 1950, 190-193. Points out that, although systematic research in child development and family relations has contributed largely to our insight, the most comprehensive body of knowledge and understanding has grown out of the give and take of parents.
 42. Reynolds, E. J., "If Teachers Really Knew Parents," *School and Community*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, January 1950, 21. Presents the point of view that knowing parents personally causes better understanding and deeper appreciation for the homes of the pupils and suggests the importance of making an effort to get together.
 43. "Did You Attend Parents' Night?" *Better Homes and Gardens*, Child Care and Training Department, October 1948. This article, encouraging both parents to attend PTA meetings and parent-teacher interviews, is cited as illustrating the type of help that can often be secured through the pages of this magazine and others, which are concerned with home living of the whole family and so are concerned with the relationship of home and school. A teacher will also find much helpful background material on topics discussed during interviews.

Teacher-Parent Interviews is a subject in which the National Congress of Parents and Teachers is, of course, vitally interested. The official organ of the organization, *The National Parent-Teacher*, always has articles a teacher will find useful. The address of National Congress of Parents and Teachers is 600 S. Michigan Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois. If the school does not supply the magazine and the various pamphlets the organization publishes, it is suggested that a teacher will find it helpful to secure these individually.

346 SOME SUGGESTED READINGS

51. *Helping Teachers Understand Children*. The Staff of the Division on Child Development and Teacher Personnel, prepared for the Commission on Teacher Education. Washington, D. C.: The American Council on Education, 1945. A pamphlet that is particularly useful in helping teachers understand why children do the things they do. This is material that one can read and reread with benefit.
52. Hymes, James L., Jr., *A Pound of Prevention*. Committee on Mental Hygiene State Charities Aid. Assoc. 105 E. 22nd St., New York. A pamphlet that helps teachers to understand better how children feel inside and why they do the things they do.
53. Theman, Viola, *A Good Day in School*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1950. A picture of school days that are good living for children. An easy to read pamphlet that parents would enjoy and that would offer many things to talk about in the interview.
54. Witry, Paul, *Helping Children Read Better*. Science Research Associates, 57 W. Grand Ave., Chicago 10, Illinois, 1950. This organization publishes a quantity of very useful practical pamphlets and leaflets covering all manner of topics likely to come up in interviews. These deal with all the different ages but more particularly with preadolescent and adolescent. They are useful for both teacher and parent.

The following are the types of pamphlets that a teacher may find it useful to suggest for parent reading when matters of home guidance (such as those indicated by the titles) have come up in the interview and the parents want to pursue them further:

55. Auerbach, Aline B., *Discipline through Affections*. Child Study Association of America, 132 East 74th St., New York 21, N. Y. This Association publishes many very useful pamphlets and leaflets, and also the magazine *Child Study*, which comes out quarterly. It would be a good idea to get a list of their publications and to look over the magazine to see if it might not be one that would be useful to have for the parents. It is written primarily for well-educated parents.
56. Baruch, Dorothy, *Understanding Young Children*. New York,

- Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1950.
57. Burgess, Helen S., *Discipline, What Is It?* Child Study Association of America, 132 East 74th St., New York, 1948. This organization has many pamphlets and leaflets that a teacher would find helpful to use in connection with matters talked over in interviews with parents. A list of publications can be secured on request.
 58. Grossman, Jean Schick, *You Don't Have To Be Perfect (Even If You Are a Parent)*, National Association for Mental Health, 1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. This is another organization that puts out helpful material which both teachers and parents can use profitably. It is a good idea to get on their mailing list.
 59. Hymes, James L., Jr., *A Healthy Personality for Your Child*. U. S. Children's Bureau, Federal Security Agency, Washington, D. C. It is suggested that a teacher would do well to send to the Supt. of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for the publications of the Children's Bureau and other government agencies concerned with children.
 60. Hymes, James L., Jr., *Discipline*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951. By writing here a teacher can get a list of the many publications from which a selection can be made of the ones it would be helpful to own. Several are included in this list of selected readings because of their practical usefulness.
 61. Hymes, James L., Jr., *How To Tell Your Child about Sex*. Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 149. Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 22 East 38th St., New York, N. Y., 1949.
 62. *Jealousy and Rivalry in Children*. Child Study Association of America, 132 East 74th St., New York 21, N. Y., 1946.
 63. Redl, Fritz, *Pre-adolescents: What Makes Them Tick?* Child Study Association of America, 132 East 74th St., New York 21, N. Y., 1948.
 64. Redl, Fritz, *Understanding Children's Behavior*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1950.
 65. *Your Child from Six to Twelve*. Washington, D. C., U. S. Children's Bureau, Superintendent of Documents. A practical, useful, authentic handbook for parents, 1949.

Index

A

Absence from school, planning together about, 103
Accepting attitude, teacher's:
 basic to good interviews, 335
 of children, 50
 of parents, 54, 191, 195, 289, 335
 of parents' statements, 136, 298, 300
 of varying home patterns, 55, 138
Achievements, non-academic as well as academic, 153
Acquainting parents with school, 82, 85
Administrator:
 arranging teachers' time, 273
 building teachers' confidence in interviewing, 71
 can give help, 23
 consult before using community agencies, 198
 consult on problems not in teacher's province, 201
 get approval from when school absence involved, 104
 good interviews a help to, 14
 guides for certain interviews, given by, 258
 his secretary's part in interviews, 275, 279, 283
 informing parents of interview plan, 278
 knowing interview plans, 282
 matters of policy referred to, 265
 over-all point of view, 61

Administrator (*Continued*):
 participant in interview, 84, 264
 preferences for place of interview, 270
 presenting interview plan to, 71
 records wanted by, 321, 331
 refer to when an administrative matter, 103, 105, 106
 talking over parents' complaints with, 95, 311
 viewpoint on interviews, 13
Adverse comment:
 meeting constructively, 206
 understanding cause of, 206
Advice to be avoided in favor of suggestions, 99
Ambitions, parents' for child:
 base on child's development, 158
 discussed with teacher, 96
 important to know, 132
 teacher's understanding of, 107
Angry parent, trying to understand, 184
Appraising an interview, 331
Appreciation, child's need for, 165
Arithmetic at home, 155
Assets for interviewing, teacher's, 196
Attitude, administrator's:
 about function of the school, 67, 70
 about interviews, 69
 toward parents' relationship to school, 65
Attitude, child's:
 toward parents, 29

350 INDEX

Attitude, child's (*Continued*):

toward teacher, 35

Attitude, parents':

toward teacher, 45

toward being parents, 44

Attitude, teacher's:

about complaints, 97

toward children, 50

toward parents, 53

Authoritativeness, teacher's, to be avoided, 303

Authority, impersonal, 111

Authority vs. freedom discussed with parents, 93

B

Basic cause of behavior in feelings, 29

Basic factors in interview:

administrator's attitude about school, 67

administrator's feelings, 61

feelings of all concerned, 25

teacher's accepting attitude, 73

teacher's feeling about being a teacher, 57

teacher's feeling about children, 57

teacher's feelings about interviews, 60

Behavior:

child experimenting with, 151

parents' label for, important to know, 134

Behavior difficulty:

at home, giving help on, 100

at school, home help needed, 90

guidance counsellor's help on, 91

on school bus, 105

Benefits from interviews, 274

Blame or condemnation:

child's feeling of, to be avoided, 84, 95

discussing behavior difficulty without, 91

of parents, not useful, 79, 291, 299, 305

reduced by desire to understand, 184

Building good will, 14

C

Calling for child promptly, 148

Career exploration, 176

Change of school, planning together about child's, 82

Child:

administrator's attitude toward, 62

parents' attitude toward, 39

setting sights on, for interviews, 19

teacher's attitude toward, 50

Child in interview, 263, 270

Child's activities at home, parents' comments about, 128, 129

Child's conferences with teacher important, 120

Child's feelings:

affect schoolwork, 35

mixed, 37

outgrowth of experiences, 29

teacher's business, 34

understanding them important, 38

Child's idea of self, important, 157

Child's infancy, parents' recollection of, 129

Child's own pace, letting him set, 146

Child's philosophy of living noted, 120

Child's refusals discussed, 132

Child's strength:

building on, 175

calling his attention to, 87

getting parents' viewpoint on, 130

important to emphasize, 130, 147

mentioned in reporting progress, 187

telling parents evidences of, 118

Comic books, radio, television, 129

Comments of parents invited, 123

Community:

child's attitude toward, 33

parents' attitude toward, 43

Community agencies, help of, 197

Comparisons to be avoided, 80, 84, 93, 117, 147

Complaints, parents':

freedom at school, 93

grades, 96

homework, 97

not defensive about, 310

other children, 94

school bus behavior, 105

Concentration, child's, relate to development, 167

Considering parents' convenience, 280, 284

Continuing need for interviews, 17

Counselling interviewing, 4

D

- Demands, being reasonable about, 165
- Democratic living, beginning of, 118
- Dictatorial control vs. teacher guidance, discussed with parents, 94
- Difficulties, deeply-rooted, not in teacher's province, 200
- Discipline, parents' comments about, 126

E

- Ease in interview:
 - arrangements affecting, 277, 283, 284,
 - courteous listening a help toward, 300, 302
 - feeling of friendliness helps, 288
 - interruptions avoided, 284
 - making a natural start, 285
 - manner of closing affects, 292
 - taking parents seriously helps toward, 302
 - talking together naturally, 3, 16, 19, 75, 305
 - teacher's manner contributes to, 286
 - teacher's understanding, a factor, 287
- Encouragement, parents' need for, 262, 290
- Enjoyment of children:
 - administrator's, significant to interview, 62, 64
 - teacher's, revealed in interview, 50
- Enriched experiences, planning together for, 80
- Evasive parent, persistent friendliness toward, 187
- Expectations, parents' for child, help explain behavior, 134
- Extracurricular activities scheduled, 110

F

- Family emergency, planning together about, 99
- Family enjoyments, parents' comments about, 127
- Family living patterns, varied, to be considered, 89
- Family make-up, useful to know, 138
- Family relationships significant, 139
- Father in interview, 263, 335

- Favorable comment, be generous with, 102

Fears:

- administrators, about interviews, 70
- administrator's understanding of teacher's, 70
- of interviews unnecessary, 18, 19
- parents', of teacher, 46, 262
- teacher's, of parents, 53
- Fitting school and home together, 5
- Freedom in school, explanations about, 93
- Freedom to use initiative discussed, 111
- Friends, child's:
 - parents' attitude about, 125
 - parents' acceptance of important, 156
 - special ones important, 125

G

- General topics to discuss, 20
- Getting acquainted, interview for, 84
- Gossipy information, handling professionally, 209
- Grades:
 - parents' attitude toward, 171
 - parents' complaints about, 96
 - reporting by interview, 86
- Group acceptance, 161
 - important to child, 164
 - related to school progress, 177
- Group living, child's progress in, 121
- Guidance counselling, 172
- Guidance counsellor:
 - help on behavior difficulty, 91
 - matters to leave to, 41
 - when deep-seated difficulties indicated, refer to, 95

H

- Half-day session, planning with parents, 89
- Health matters, refer to specialist, 204
- Hectograph for home use, 117
- Helps in interviewing, 23, 24, 337
- High School teachers and parents, 172
- Home:
 - child's attitude toward, 32
 - parents' attitude toward, 42
 - teacher's attitude toward, 55
 - on high school subjects, 174

Home (*Continued*):

- needed on school behavior, 90
- discussing possibilities of, 84

Home help:

- arranging for, 83
- through broadening experiences, 151
- through encouragement of school activities, 161
- to supplement school experiences, 89

Home interview:

- advantages of, 264, 269
- for parents' convenience, 188
- participants in, 264
- when not advisable, 270

Home pattern, individual matter, 56

Homes, varied, 42, 43

Homework:

- planning together about, 162
- varied ideas about, 97

Hurried parents, adjusting to, 188

I

Incidental information:

- following up, 77
- important for understanding, 77, 108, 140

Incidental interviews:

- as parents help in school, 274
- at chance meeting places, 271

Independence, child's:

- accepting attitude toward, 143
- free time on aid to, 166
- in working out relationships, 151
- opportunity to grow in, 164
- shows in arguments, 156

Independent thinking emphasized, 120

Independent work periods, 110

Individual characteristics, child's:

- in eye development, affects reading, 149
- to be considered, 9, 81

Individual progress vs. competitive grading, 87

Indifference to suggestions in interview, 220

Information given by parents:

- about home pressures, 97
- helpful, 9, 11, 12, 17, 35, 82
- in reporting school progress, 86
- on child's comments about school, 122
- on values emphasized, 120

Initiative for interview:

- taken by administrator, 275
- taken by child, 276
- taken by parents, examples of, 91-107, 275, 279
- taken by principal's office, 275
- taken by teacher, examples of, 78-91, 274, 279

Integrity, teacher's, important, 296

Interests at home, important to know, 123

Interviewing:

- counselling, 4
- naturalness of, 4, 75
- what it is, 1

Interviews:

- administrator's attitude toward, 13, 59, 69, 71
- affected by feelings, 25, 26, 38, 39
- at mother's office, pending separation, later to Guidance Counsellor, 241
- child resentful toward mother, 232
- children with relatives, change in home, 252
- crowded poor home but great interest, 239
- gifted child, trouble with relationships, 233
- great interest in discussing school activities, 248
- hard not to advise, 245
- Indian family, getting acquainted, 237
- invitations to home, teacher's acceptance of, 271
- keeping purposeful, 107
- mother with fear of teachers, 240
- necessity to give unpleasant information, 248
- no "problem," 11, 235
- on matters outside teacher's province, 225
- parents' attitude toward, 6, 47, 332
- parents easy-going and very interested, 230
- probably little either teacher or counsellor can do, 237
- question of mother working, 245
- school taken lightly, 229
- showing parents' ambitions for child, 226

Interviews (*Continued*):

- talking over father's ideas of boy's need, 251
- teacher listened to father with ideas for the school, 250
- teacher might have been hurt, but was not, 234
- teacher moved slowly, 231
- teacher's attitude toward, 9, 59
- through interpreter, 227
- vocational interest, 243
- when principal joined, 224
- with mother in broken home, 221
- with parents of adopted children, 218
- with parents of twins, 218

L

- Late hours, parents' concern about, 102, 176
- Learning to interview:
 - administrator will help, 23
 - is possible, 22
 - readings to aid understanding, 23
 - utilizing help of specialist, 22
- Letting parent talk, 216
- Limits:
 - children want them, 159
 - necessary to set, 159
- Listening to parents:
 - about their enjoyments, 306
 - a way of learning about child, 94
 - courteous after asking question, 122
 - helps in understanding their feelings, 129
 - important in getting acquainted, 86
 - in considering school progress, 86
 - not interrupting with advice, 101
 - to get their point of view, 98
 - to understand reasons for request, 106
 - when they have a tale to tell, 309
 - with respect when voicing complaints, 95
 - without being shocked, 199
 - without blame or condemnation, 190
 - without bristling, 127
 - without impatience, 185
- Living patterns, varied, teacher's acceptance of, 138

M

- Manners, making them genuine, 146
- Marital difficulties, not in teacher's province, 198
- Materials:
 - child's progress in use of, 115
 - creative use of, 145
- Matters outside the teacher's province, 291
- Mixed feelings:
 - child's, 37
 - parents', 39, 40, 42, 46, 47
 - teacher's, 52, 53, 58
- Money, parents' comments about, important, 137

N

- Naturalness of interviewing, 4, 19, 140, 196, 253
- Negative feelings, parents', about themselves, 44
- Not making parents over, 5
- Number of interviews, 274

O

- Obedience:
 - expectations concerning, 134
 - parents' comments about, 126
 - with understanding, 112
- Opening the interview, 285
- Over-all planning important, 255

P

- Painting for painting's sake, 144
- Parental resistance to suggestions, 186
- Parent appreciation for understanding in interview, 220
- Parent participation in school:
 - possibilities of, 88
 - teacher's request for, 88
- Parents:
 - as people, 12, 45, 139, 286
 - casual comments important, 132, 133
 - confidences respected, 131, 298
 - convenience to be considered, 272
 - reveal child's feelings, 36
 - teen-ager's attitude toward, 181
 - welcome knowing teacher, 16
- Pets, parents' attitude about, 124

Philosophy, the authors', basic to this book, 333

Planned interviews, types of, 258

Planning for interview important, 140

Planning together, teacher and parents, through common understanding, 79, 291

Preparing for scheduled interview:

child's part in, 281

school work of interest, 281

teacher's thought about, 280

Problem-loving parent, meeting need of, 192

"Problems" not necessary for interview, 20, 259, 274, 288

"Problems" not to be ignored, 289

Problems, parents', only they can work out, 101

Professional attitude:

about school policies, 211

important, 205

toward confidential school information, 211

toward parents' confidences, 297

Progress,

in little things recounted, 114

recountal of, reassuring to parents, 116

Protecting interview time, 193

Punishment, parents' comments about, 126

R

Readiness for writing and spelling, 157

Reading:

home help on, 155, 168

informal, to give practice, 114

method of teaching discussed with parents, 91

Reading readiness:

aided by reading to child for enjoyment, 150, 155

waiting for, 149

Rearing children, many "right ways," 54

Reassuring parents:

about boys' doll play, 145

about child's helpfulness, 118

about child's independence, 143

about reading, 92

often necessary, 288

on ability to work out problems, 102

on child's attitude, 32

Reassuring parents (*Continued*):

on teen-ager's attitude, 174

on teen-ager's independence, 179

Record of interview:

a means to an end, 321

changing form to fit need, 328

content will vary, 322

filing system varies, 326

identification of, 328

keeping suggestions for reference, 324

no one form for, 322, 327

noting main points, 323

simple beginning suggested, 329

some points not for written record, 325

taking notes during, 330

tentative impressions, 325

use in teaching, 321

while fresh in mind, 330

Records, useful in interview preparation, 280

Registration interview, sometimes a first step, 258

Relationships:

importance of, between teacher and parents, 295

interviews, integrating factor in, 336

summary of suggestions about, 312

Reporting on progress, 86

Resistance and antagonism aroused by arguments, 304

Respect, administrator's:

for children, 63, 69

for parents, 64, 66

Respect, teacher's:

for child, 28, 50, 51

for parents, 54

Respect for parents:

basic to good interviews, 333

begets courtesy and consideration, 318

implies acceptance, 306

implies willingness to listen, 310

includes willingness to consider complaints open-mindedly, 311

looking through acts to feelings, 306

means holding conversation confidential, 297

precludes belittling, 303

suggests giving them opportunity to talk, 308

- Respect for parents (*Continued*):
 suggests honestly spoken admiration, 307
 taking statements seriously an evidence of, 302
 Respecting parents' confidences important, 95, 129, 131, 199
 Responsibility:
 child's willingness to take, 154
 parents' attitude about, 125

S

- Schedule, reasons for explained, 109
 Scheduling interviews, 276
 School, its function, 334
 School affairs, parents' attendance important, 170
 School activities at home, 166
 School interview:
 advantages of, 267
 disadvantages of, 269
 in child's room, why, 268
 School subjects:
 achievement in, parents should know, 116
 home use of skills in, 169
 ways of teaching explained to parents, 153
 Schoolwork, suffering from absence, 78
 Seeing each other as people, 13
 Selecting type of interview, 260
 Sensitivity, parents':
 to administrator's feelings, 66
 to all feelings affecting interview, 26
 to teacher's feelings about child, 51
 to teacher's feeling about teaching, 57
 Sensitivity, teacher's:
 to administrator's feelings, 66
 to basic cause of complaints, 95
 to child's feelings, 28
 to own feelings, 49
 to parents' comments revealing child's feelings, 31
 to parents' feelings, basic to giving suggestions, 83
 to parents' feelings about child, 41
 to parents' feelings during interview, 287, 295

- Sensitivity, teacher's (*Continued*):
 to parents' feelings in deciding what to talk about, 20, 75, 78
 to time to end interview, 292
 Setting tone of interview:
 administrator's part in, 64, 67
 giving thought to, 279, 283, 285, 308
 teacher's feelings a factor in, 50
 with friendliness, 19
 Skipping a grade, 80, 106
 Special aptitude, child's, planning for, 81
 Specialist:
 an aid in learning to interview, 23
 help useful (Nutritionist), 114
 participant in interview, 265
 refer deeply-rooted difficulties to, 200
 refer health matters to, 204
 referring to, 197, 291
 utilizing help of, 197
 Special teachers can help, 81, 265
 Sticking to task, child's, 159
 Strength of child discussed, 289
 Suggestions:
 geared to parents' need, 186
 given with reason for, 142
 offered only as such, 141
 vs. advice, 56, 99, 141, 192

T

- Teachers as people, 13
 Teacher's place in group living mentioned, 121
 Teacher's province, avoid overstepping, 198
 Teacher's time for interviews:
 possible arrangements for, 273
 personal time given, 72, 272, 274
 Teen-ager, parents' attitude toward, 181
 Timidity, teacher's, about including specialists, 266

U

- Understanding:
 administrator's emphasis on, significant, 68
 clues leading to, 10, 28, 31, 36, 40

Understanding, teacher's:
 of administrative policies important,
 70
 of child's feelings important, 27, 38
 deepened during interview, 47
 of parents' everyday problems, 54
 of parents' feelings important, 41
 of parents' interest back of com-
 plaints, 91
 reduces irritation, 194
 wanting to, an important factor in,
 184

V

Values, parents interested in teacher's
 emphasis on, 119, 153

W

What interviewing is, 4
 Workbooks, making and using, 117
 Work habits emphasized, 120
 Working mother:
 considering convenience of, 273
 incidental interview convenient for,
 260
 telephone interview convenient for,
 261
 understanding situation of, 188
 Writing:
 home opportunity for, 158
 manuscript and cursive, 157